This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

3433 07481543 6

Annvat
NEW-YORK
SOCIETY
LIBRARY
1758

MILDRED CARVER, U. S. A.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO · DALLAS
ATLANTA · SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

MILDRED CARVER, U.S.A.

BY

MARTHA BENSLEY BRUÈRE

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1919

All rights reserved

GO

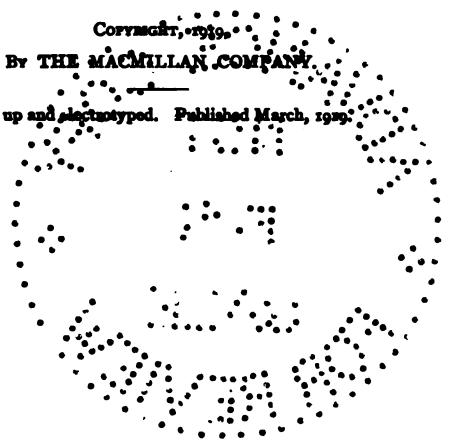
THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
925348
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
B 1918 L

PROPERTY OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY

COPYRIGHT, 1918 AND 1919,
BY THE CURTIS PUBLISHING COMPANY.

COPYRIGHT, 1919,
BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

Set up and electrotyped. Published March, 1919.



Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

F

MILDRED CARVER, U. S. A.

Mildred Carver, U. S. A.

CHAPTER I

AN extremely pretty girl came through a long window onto the veranda of a house set high above Torexo Park. The house had been built long ago by her grandfather, William Carver, a conservative gentleman who felt that his wish to live where he could look across the green summits of the Catskills justified the spending of much money. Many new people had come to live in the valley but no one could forget that his house — vast, dominating, ugly — had been the first upon the mountain side. To Mildred Carver who stood looking down the mist lined valley, the roofs of these newer houses were as familiar as the dark woods that stood along the hills, or the roads shining white in the blurred moonlight, — as familiar even as the lad who followed her through the window and over to the edge of the veranda.

Mildred had seen Nicholas Van Arsdale every day during the summer that was just fading; every day of the summer before, and of the summer before that; and every summer as far back in her eighteen years as she could remember. The Van Arsdale cottage had been built just over the shoulder of the hill soon after the last inconsequent lightning rod was set on the tower of William Carver's mansion. Memories of Nick at every height from three feet to five feet nine; in every stage

of growth from small boy stubbiness to slender, narrow-footed, brown youth; in every costume from kilts to the smartest of adult attire, were hung thick in Mildred's mental gallery.

Up to this year their friendship had been a happily commonplace affair, but now inexplicable things were continually happening between them. A year ago they would have spent the evening chattering with Ruthie and Junior or playing billiards or trying new dance steps with as many of the family as they could get to join them, instead of sitting together in the far corner of the room talking very young talk in tones pitched unconsciously below the ears of Mr. and Mrs. Carver — talk broken by disconcerting silences which neither of them knew how to fill. A year ago it wouldn't have occurred to Mildred suddenly that the big living room "glared" and that she must get out of it into something shadowy and dim, — it wouldn't have occurred to Nick that to follow her to the veranda edge was something overwhelmingly important and a very special privilege.

They stood together now — this boy and girl — above the pulsating valley. They were not thinking much, nor were they conscious of any particular feeling. The Katydids were calling back and forth below them; a belated whip-poor-will had been wakened into complaint by the moonlight; way off somewhere a hunting owl cried lonesomely. There was menace in the mist creeping up from the valley and Nick edged closer to Mildred — in spite of the great house full of servants she seemed suddenly to need protection. She leaned out into the moonlight and Nick felt a faint prickling of the spine. What had happened to make her so different? He knew her well, he had known her all his life — and yet she was utterly strange!

A harsh regular noise troubled Nick which, after such thought as he was capable of, he discovered to be the sound of his own breath rushing in and out. He was unable to think out this strange phenomenon because the fragrance floating up from a bed of late tuberoses troubled him. He could almost taste the perfume! And then the iridescent mist billowing up and down in the moonlight made him feel dizzy. He wasn't conscious of wanting to say or do anything, of having any impulses or intentions, but he heard his voice, very hoarse and hard, saying:

"Mildred, are you cold?"

As the girl turned her head to answer, the moonlight swept across her hair in tiny rainbows and before Nick knew what he was doing, his arms flung themselves around her and he kissed her on the lips.

"Nick!" she cried softly, "Nick — oh, Nick!" and struggled a little.

And then her arms, quite on their own initiative, lifted and went round his neck and she raised her lips again; and the little mist of pearl which had been slowly climbing up through the valley drowning out the tree trunks till the leaves seemed floating in a silver sea, overflowed the veranda edge and blotted out the young lovers.

CHAPTER II

LATE that night Mildred sat up in bed holding both hands close against her hot cheeks. She had set her trembling lips and kept her eyelids down while Henriette brushed out her long blond hair and braided it afresh; she had dipped in and out of her great white tub in a daze, and let the maid pull the light covers over her and switch off the light almost in silence. But when the door had shut softly, she sat up with a start, and now she held her flushed cheeks in her hot hands and looked into the dark with smiling lips and soft wide eyes that saw visions.

It hadn't felt the same — oh, not at all the same! — as the time she had sprained her ankle and he had carried her up from the boat house. No, this was quite different and much, *much* nicer. She had been too surprised and excited out there on the veranda to feel as happy as she really was. To marry Nick! Well, why not? Only she had never thought of it before. Her cheeks were cooling now and she clasped her hands over her knees. She could see the mist settling down into the valley again, shimmering like mother of pearl with the tree tops sticking through. Yes, of course she was going to marry Nick — it was the most natural thing in the world! A half submerged tree out there in the moonlight looked like a giant horse struggling through a river — a warrior's horse carrying a knight of the Round Table. How she used to imagine herself a lady out of the Idylls of the King — Elaine usually, only it was always Sir Gareth she dreamed about, contrary to the

precedent of the poem! It might be Sir Gareth on just such a charger as the tree seemed to be! And then her power of picturing showed her Nick on Sheridan II; a slim, straight figure in London riding clothes and the trimmest of boots on a delicate footed bay with nothing nearer the caparisoning of the jousts than a light bridle and the merest suggestion of a saddle. Nick was a good rider but he was not in the least like Sir Gareth, and he preferred his motor to all the horses that ever galloped over a thousand hills. But of course she couldn't expect Sir Gareth — there weren't any men like that now. Yes, she and Nick would be married. She wondered idly whether they would live here or at the Van Arsdale house. Nick's mother was dead, so probably they would go there. It didn't seem to matter much.

The mist had sunk further into the valley, and the charger plunging through the silver stream turned out to be nothing but a quite ordinary oak tree that almost always had wormy acorns — they'd talked of cutting it down! Everybody expected her to marry — usually girls married soon after they were presented to society — most of her cousins had. Only of course there was Lucile — she hadn't married. But then she had gone into the Red Cross during the war and been in France in a hospital. It was more interesting to hear her tell about it than anything — for all she had heard it so many times. Why even Aunt Millicent was proud of her — and usually Aunt Millicent wanted everybody to be exactly like everybody else. And there was Agnes, — she had married a man that nobody knew. He taught something somewhere, and she had heard her aunts say that of course they must remember that Agnes' mouth wasn't good and she stooped — and involuntarily Mildred squared her shoulders.

She looked through the window again. The moon had set and a careless sort of a wind had driven all the silver mist out of the valley. But there was a dull glow over the hill! It must be a fire! She got out of bed and ran to the window. It was a fire, she could see the flames! It looked like the new house the Arnolds had built. And then came the clang and rush of the fire engines and at quick intervals the lights of motor cars which she knew were carrying the boys of the Universal Service up to help fight the fire. A motor started in the lower drive below the house and the light sped away through the trees. It sounded like Nick's little grey racer but of course it couldn't be.

Mildred's cheeks were quite cool now and her new emotion had run down like a clock. She went back to bed and pulled up the covers. Certainly there wasn't any reason why she should lie awake because she was going to marry Nick! And throwing her blond braid back on the pillow and tucking her hand under her cheek she went placidly to sleep.

CHAPTER III

NICHOLAS VAN ARSDALE, in a state of serene unconsciousness, had stepped from the Carver's veranda into the encircling mist and begun to feel his way down the path. To listen to his pounding heart beats absorbed all his conscious attention but he instinctively followed the descending road to the lower drive where he bumped into a standing automobile. Walking around this in a beatific trance he felt his way onward still with the feel of Mildred's lips on his. What a wonderful thing to have happened! If anybody had told him even this morning that he was in love with Mildred he would have said — no, he was not — and here he had been all the time and no more knowing it than if there'd be rain next week!

So this was being in love! Nick was eighteen, which seemed to him a great number of years in which never to have been in love before. Well, it was a great idea — being in love — he had that to say for it at the start. Of course, when he had thought of what it would be like, he had had a picture of a sort of Spanish girl with a lace thing on her head — singing or dancing or something like that. Great black eyes, you know, and short high-heeled slippers like the girls on the stage. But now it was Mildred! And he had been in love with her without knowing it at all! It wasn't a bit like what he'd expected, but they'd be married and do everything together just as they always had — only it would all be different, of course — being married. And he thought

of his father and how he'd probably give her all the jewels his mother had had. Nick had sometimes imagined it would be fun to give these things to a little Cinderella sort of girl who had never had anything pretty — but of course Mildred was nicer than anybody else could be — only it had been pleasant to think of that little Spanish Cinderella! Well, when they were married —

Nick interrupted himself by coming out on a knoll and noticing that the mist was driving out of the valley and that over toward the upper end of the Park a red glow was striking up into the sky. As he stopped to watch it, came the clang of the fire engines rushing up from the village below. Nick knew that the Universal Service boys stationed in Torexo must be tumbling into their clothes and getting their cars out to follow. They always got a chance to help in any sort of emergency duty, even if their regular work was keeping the roads in order and distributing the mail and dull things like that. But fires were rare in Torexo. He didn't want to miss this one even if he wasn't in the Service. He'd get his car, — and then he remembered that he'd gone to the Carver's house in his motor. Why, that must have been it he bumped into in the lower drive! He stopped short in sudden realization of the fact that he hadn't known his own car when he saw it — hadn't remembered that there was such a thing in the world!

"Well I should say I *am* in love!" he cried aloud and turning ran back through the clearing air.

If Mildred and he could go together on this adventure! He peered up at her windows but there was no stir. The whole house was dark. A flood of emotion engulfed him — Mildred! He loved her and she loved him — it was the greatest thing in the world! Why, she was probably thinking about him at this very minute!

He sprang into the car and was about to start the engine when he heard quick steps running down the road from the house. Could it by any possibility be Mildred? He waited, his hand on the lever. They were strong footsteps beating a rapid tremolo on the hard road. Somebody was making good time. Nick's lamps threw a steady white river before him and the invisible runner blurred the foot beats together in a final burst of speed and plunged into the light. It was Wicks, one of the Carver's young footmen!

Nick straightened from the wheel in disappointment. He had been sure it must be Mildred because he wanted her to come.

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Nicholas, sir!" the man gasped. "I saw the headlight and I thought I might catch it, sir. If the fire's in the woods I might help. I did my service in the Forestry and learned about fire fighting out west. Are you going to it, sir?"

"Yes, jump in, Wicks."

They struck down into the valley. The mist was all gone now and they followed clear roads in the soft dark after moonset and rushed on toward the mounting flames.

"I didn't know you'd been in the Service, Wicks. What did you do?"

"It was two years ago, Mr. Nicholas. I didn't choose what I'd like to do so they put me in the Forestry. I cleared out the dead bushes and trees, sir, and the gang boss'd tell me how to girdle a tree that ought to come down, and we got more kinds of bugs and worms that eats trees than you'd know there was, and sent 'em to Washington. We done a lot of work trying to find out what was killing the chestnuts, and planting other kinds — specially from China — to see if they'd get the blight."

"Did they get it?"

"I don't know, sir, my year was up before they found out. But when I'm off duty at the house I go into the woods here and see if there's anything more I can find out about them. I sent a new kind of fungus up to the Department last week."

Nick's lips formed themselves into a silent whistle as he forced his car up a steep grade.

"You seem to have liked the Service."

"You bet!"

Nick grinned. It tickled his taste to find that this man whom he had thought merely a uniformed hander of plates and opener of doors, was an independent citizen collecting destructive fungi for the government, the possible discoverer of the cure for the chestnut blight, which had so distressed his father and the other residents of Torexo Park.

"If you like it so much why did you come back and be a footman?"

"Well, sir, it isn't that I want to. I'd have give anything to have gone into the Forestry regular. But my mother, she's in New York and she couldn't make out without me another year. You see I wouldn't be getting anything for my first year in the Forestry but my keep and twenty a month. But some time I'm going back to it, you bet."

Nick shot the car furiously up under the road-side trees and they tumbled out and ran toward the burning house.

It was a modern house trying to look as though it were old. Artificially and needlessly it straggled along the ground pretending that it had been added to ell by ell through the generations instead of having been built all at once by an expensive and fashionable architect. The

trees overhung the low gables in an affectionate ancestral way carefully induced by a landscape gardener, and close back of it rose a great white pine. Wicks, dashing on ahead of Nick, groaned as he saw the sparks flying toward this tree. They were both stopped by a lad in khaki uniform who ordered them back, but Wicks cried out:

"I'm Forestry Service — two years back — fought a lot of fires — better let me help."

The Service lad relaxed.

"Sure we need you! There's the captain — report to him."

Nick tried to follow Wicks but the Service boy swung out before him.

"See here, young feller, you get back to the line — see!"

"Confound you — I'm going to help — let me by!"

"You ever been in the Service?"

"No, I haven't, but I can carry Mrs. Arnold's chairs and tables out of that house as well as the rest of you. You let me by!"

The Service boy — Nick recognized him as a young westerner who assisted in the Torexo Post Office — kept crowding him back and the dispute threatened to become a personal conflict when Nick felt his arm caught and turning saw his father, who, having been roused from his reading, had come up the hill on foot.

"Hullo, son, how did you get here? I thought you were dining with Mrs. Carver?"

At the memory, the boy caught his breath. Mildred had been sitting on the other side of the table and he had never dreamed of being in love with her! But he was able to answer his father steadily enough:

"I was there, sir, but I saw the fire and came in my car."

"Pretty good work these young men are doing. They're getting a lot of the furniture out but I don't think they can save the house. Pity if the fire gets those pines!"

"O, Lord, I wish they'd let me help! I could carry rugs as well as they can! What's the use of their keeping me out because they're in the Service? It isn't fair! No, I'm not going to butt in" (this to the young westerner). "Don't you dare wave your hand at me again, though! I'm as big as you are if you are nineteen and I won't stand it!"

Mr. Van Arsdale laughed and caught him by the arm again.

"Here, you young hot head — your turn will come next year!"

The crowd of neighbors swayed back and forth in the light of the burning house. Some of them tried to comfort Mrs. Arnold who sat on a little hillock crying and clutching her wide-eyed children; for even if you are rich enough to own an imitation ancestral home, and socially important enough to have it set in Torexo Park, you do have an occasional human feeling; and while your control over your tear ducts is probably greater than that of ordinary mortals, it is still not absolute. It was surprising how many more people there were in Torexo than Nick knew — and yet his father entertained everybody at dinner at least once during the summer! He began to recognize faces here and there which he had only seen before under maids' caps or above servants' uniforms. His talk with Wicks had somewhat widened the population of the place. It now included servants! The people were in all sorts of haphazard costumes, but blended into harmony by the setting and the light of the fire like the peasant chorus in an opera. Here and there

some one would stand out from the chorus like a "principal" and Nick noticed that it was just as likely to be somebody's chauffeur as "somebody" himself.

Nick ranged round the edges of the crowd trying again and again to break into the ranks of the fire fighters and being repulsed with increasing hauteur by the uniformed Service boys — lads whom he ordinarily disregarded because they were different from himself; as he had disregarded the boys who went to the public schools, instead of having tutors or going to Groton; boys who had bicycles instead of automobiles; boys who worked in stores or offices instead of playing polo. Now these boys in the Service were disregarding him because they worked and he didn't!

Nick and his father stayed till the house had been mostly reduced to red coals. Mr. Van Arsdale would have been glad to go earlier but he stayed to restrain his son, whose ideas of authority as vested in any one but himself were purely rudimentary. When at last Nick was content to go, the older man sighed in relief. This only child of his was most particularly dear, but life for him had settled down into an easy routine which he resented having disturbed — the routine of generations of rich scholars whose investments, providently made in the previous century, had gone on increasing automatically in value so that they could pursue learning entirely for its own sake.

"I guess I better take Wicks home too," Nick remarked absently as they reached his automobile.

"Who's Wicks?"

"He's the Carvers' footman. I brought him up with me."

"Well, can't he get back by himself? It's not far."

"But you see, sir, he's been in the Service — in the

Forestry — and he's been fighting the fire. They let *him!*"

Nick ran back for Wicks and his father sat in the motor wondering. Did a footman's having been in the Universal Service make him any less a footman? Put any more obligation on Nick to drive him back in his car? Make it necessary for himself, Henry Van Arsdale, to wait when he was anxious to get to bed?

"Wicks is going to stay," said Nick, reappearing. "He's out there where the wind's blowing too, watching to put out sparks. He says he wouldn't feel right to go when there's a chance of a forest fire getting started. He thinks it's up to him because he worked for the United States for a year."

And Mr. Van Arsdale wondered again at the attitude of the footman toward the country and of his son toward the footman.

Nick's little gray racer slid down into the dark of the valley, the headlight picking out one tree after another in autumn red or brown or deceptive spring-like green. The boy was still railing at not having been allowed to help at the fire and wholly occupied with his rebuff by the Service men. The connection between his mind and the event on the veranda seemed broken.

"Wait till next year, though — then I'll be in it myself — then they can't keep me out just because I'm not in uniform. Just wait till next year!"

But suddenly the boy jammed in the brake and brought the car to a stop with a jolt that nearly disemboweled it and almost threw his father out.

"Dad," he whispered, turning a white face to his father. "Dad, I can't go into the Service — I'd forgotten — Mildred and I are going to be married."

The elder man recovered himself a little testily. Violence did not appeal to him.

"What do you mean by nearly breaking my neck like this?"

"Mildred and I are going to be married!"

"Well, what of it? Everybody always supposed you would be."

"But I can't go into the Service then."

The older man looked his son over speculatively.

"It looks to me as though you've forgotten that you've got to go into the Service whether you want to or not. They don't ask you whether you're going to be married, or vaccinated or graduated or anything else — they ask you if you're eighteen years old and if you are you have to go. In your normal frame of mind you know this as well as I do. Mildred has got to go into the Service too. And you ought to know, if you don't, that the law doesn't recognize any marriage between people who haven't served their year."

Nick drummed impatiently on the steering wheel.

"But I'm going to marry Mildred."

"I haven't the slightest objection to your marrying Mildred. She's a fine girl with a good little brain of her own, and she wouldn't be marrying you for the money. I imagine everybody would be pleased about it. But the Universal Service isn't a thing you can dodge, my son. Every excuse that can possibly be thought of has been tried already and unless you are physically disabled or mentally deficient — and I'm proud to say you're neither — you've the choice of going into the Service or going into jail, and incidentally losing your citizenship, and so has Mildred. Don't be a fool, Nick."

"But, dad — Mildred — I asked her to marry me this evening!"

"That's all right — the most natural thing in the world! But after all, Nick, though I believe in early

marriages, eighteen is a bit too young even from my standpoint, and I think Frank and Mary Carver will agree with me. I'm glad Mildred is willing to marry you. It greatly diminishes the chance of your making a fool of yourself over some one you couldn't marry — but I'll not aid or abet any son of mine in being a slacker. If I remember the date, both you and my future daughter-in-law — bless the dear child! — will be drafted in about six weeks."

Nick started his car again and drove home in absolute silence. His mind was oscillating between thoughts of Mildred — so wonderful as he found her under this new emotion — and thoughts of the Service which he had so passionately desired back there at the fire.

CHAPTER IV

MILDRED would have been glad to oversleep the next morning but that was not a thing countenanced by her mother. Mrs. Carver was busily engaged in training her daughter in the virtues of princesses which seem to be much the same whether these fortunate young persons have titles and live in Europe or merely have breeding, birth and fortune and live in America. So in spite of her new consciousness of importance as a girl who had given her promise of marriage and so settled her life in its preordained channel, Mildred came to the family table at the usual time, ate just as hearty a breakfast as usual, put just as much cream on her dish of late peaches and showed just as fundamental an objection to oatmeal as she usually did.

Mildred watched her mother, serene and trim as one who is about to attack competently the country routine of consulting her housekeeper, surveying her gardens and instructing her secretary. Mrs. Carver was physically no great contrast to her eldest daughter, a little darker, a little less tall and slender, just a trifle less differentiated from the dead level of the race, as being one joint further back on the parent stem. Mildred wondered if her mother would be surprised to know she was going to marry Nick. What would her father think? He was a silent man, tall, blonde and, to the eye, English. A shade finer than his wife in the details of culture, but

very like her in type. Mildred looked like both her parents without any conflict of features.

Mr. Carver was just finishing his eggs in the imperturbability born of the conscious ability to follow the command of taking no thought of what he should eat or what he should put on when Wicks came in with the morning letters on a tray, a function which he performed in the country, Waddell the butler being left in charge of the New York house. There was a pile of letters for her mother, a few for her father, two for her mother's secretary, Miss Price, a Wellesley girl, one for Junior's tutor, Mr. Harmine. After all these had been laid beside the plates, Wicks came back around the table, stopped for an appreciable moment behind her chair, and then with a hand that was not as steady as the hand of the perfect footman should be, put beside her a large square envelope, redirected from New York, and marked in the upper left-hand corner:

Department of Universal Service
Washington, D. C.

Mildred took the envelope uncomprehendingly and opened it. A stiff printed announcement, — large, formidable, — summoning her, Mildred Carver, by the authority of the President and Congress of the United States, as she was eighteen years old to enter the National Service on the first day of October and to remain in it for twelve months thereafter. She was to indicate on the inclosed blanks the division of the Service she preferred, and be ready for departure when she was notified. It was signed by the Secretary of Universal Service.

Mildred looked up after what seemed to her a long, long interval. Her eyes fixed themselves on the painting by Constable over the old oak sideboard — a scene of

assured and stable peace, sad-colored trees that had never swung in any breeze, still cows immovable for all time on the eternally sere grass! They dropped to the great silver urn below it and its rich flanking of serving dishes, shifted to the fluttering silk curtains, woven and dyed to suit the room; to the old carved chairs brought from Holland, and the sunlight sifting over the rich colors of the old rug brought from Persia, and in all the costliness of her surroundings Mildred found no help. And her father and mother were reading their letters as carelessly as though nothing had happened! Ruthie and Junior were disputing as to whose turn it was to use the tennis court! And here was this thing in her hand! The only difference was her consciousness that Wicks still stood behind her chair. She turned and looked at him with such frightened, entreating eyes that the footman leaned forward instantly.

"Yes, miss. Can I get you anything, miss?" and then very low, "It won't be so bad as you're afraid of, miss, — believe me," and drew her chair back as she rose.

With this first stone in the pathway of true love concealed in the pocket of her sport skirt, Mildred waited all the morning for Nick. But Nick wasn't in the habit of coming to the house in the forenoon and he didn't now — even in the young of the established classes habits form early and are hard to break. He didn't come in the early afternoon either because his Universal Service order had been in the same mail with Mildred's and his father and he had been thrashing out the matter — backward, forward and criss-cross. Mr. Van Arsdale found that the old Dutch tenacity was not all dead in his line when he tried to adjust his beloved son and heir to an absolute command of which he didn't see the use. So that when Nick did appear in the Carver house not only was it late

in the day, but every cell in his brain and every nerve in his body was set in resistance. He had caught the spent bullet of his last night's emotion as a little ball of leaden obstinacy, and came marching up the steps like a defiant young Dutch burgher.

Wicks, an expressionless footman again, instead of a fire fighter, led him to the library where tea was set, and was still in the doorway as he walked straight to Frank Carver, serenely dividing his attention between a cup of tea, a cigar and an English magazine, and asked in all seriousness for Mildred's hand.

It was a startling thing to happen in a modern household. The footman stood gaping; Frank dropped his cigar into his tea while his wife came quickly across to him. Mildred, aghast, felt herself set back into the line of past generations, as though all the successive births, marriages, and deaths of all the successive generations of the Carvers, like the cycle of an insect's life from worm to cocoon to butterfly to worm again, were an inevitable chain that bound her. And yet according to all the romance of her academic reading this was exactly the proper thing for Nick to do. As Mildred looked at her parents it struck her that they didn't seem so very much surprised after all. Was it just what they had expected of her then?

But her father was drawing her down on the arm of his chair and saying exactly what she ought to have expected — exactly what she did expect down in the subconscious part of her that determined things by feeling because it hadn't yet learned to think. Her father, with her mother to back him up, told them that they were very young — a fact that Mildred could see Nick resenting as bitterly as she did; that they hadn't had any experience, which they refused to admit; and that they

hadn't done their year in the Universal Service, which hadn't struck either of them as important until the arrival of the government orders that day. They must wait at least a year for any sort of an engagement. In the meantime they were expected to be just good friends as they had always been. No, there wasn't any objection to Nick — he was a dear boy. If they wanted to talk of it when they were older — but in the meantime —

And so Mildred and Nick went out on the veranda again and vowed to each other that they would wait if they must — an inescapable Service and non-understanding parents interposing temporarily insuperable objections.

In the six weeks before they were called to the Service they tried hard to make an adventure of their clandestine engagement, — and every member of the household helped them.

"Henriette! Henriette!" Wicks called frantically from the servants' door, "Whadda ya want to go that way for? Didn't you see Miss Mildred going down that path after lunch was through? Ah, come back, girl — have a heart!"

"Weeks, the manners of a gentleman you have not! Is it you cannot observe Mr. Nicholas behind the fountain? Till you remove from the door, can he approach the tea house where Ma'mzelle remains? I ask you as a gentleman?"

The contrite Wicks hastily followed the observing Henriette out of sight — and if they turned to see through the curtain again, shall any one blame them?

Mildred would drift languidly out of the breakfast room and vanish with obtrusive carelessness down the rhododendron path and there would be Nick waiting for her at the seat by the spring. She always went to these

meetings in high expectation. Did she not know from books exactly how she ought to feel? And since she had a well trained imagination she took it for granted that she really did feel as she thought she ought, although when actually with him in the sentimental rôle of a belovèd object, there was nothing to talk of and little to do.

And the unexpected monotony of being surreptitiously engaged to the dearest girl in the world so got on Nick's nerves that he became daily more attentive and loverlike lest Mildred should suspect his moments of ennui — so very affectionate in fact that she was eaten with self-reproach at being unable to rise to his pitch. And when in a fit of desperation he rushed down to New York and bought her a ring set with a pink pearl, she cried as much in disappointment at her own lack of emotional exaltation as with pleasure at the lovely symbol. It was a hard, bewildering time for them both. There were no gaps of knowledge or experience or circumstance for their talk to bridge; even in years they were too equal to strike fire. They thought alike, they had done the same things, they knew the same people, and now they had concerned themselves in the same love affair! Why, they might have been married twenty years! But of course even if their engagement did need considerable prodding to come up to expectations, their marriage would make up for it. Their only new interest was to go over the lists labeled: "Open to recruits from cities of 500,000 inhabitants and over," and decide which should be their first, second and third choice. It was something which lent substance to the rather attenuated unrealities of their love affair.

"You see, Mildred," said Nick rather dolefully, "the work that is open to us is mostly in the country or at least in the very small towns. There's work in the post offices in all the cross roads; and there's road making and trans-

portation — I suppose that would be fixing tracks and sweeping cars and entrancing things like that — and forestry and agriculture and mines and all this column of queer things like geodetics and hydrostatics, that I don't know about, — and of course there's the army and navy and nursing — but none of it smiles much to me. Arthur Wintermute told me he registered for aviation. I don't see how he could run an aeroplane — he's never done a thing in his life. He never goes anywhere without that valet, Mapes, tagging along. I guess he thinks Mapes can run the plane for him."

"I wonder," said Mildred slowly, "what it would be like to really work — to have to do something whether you wanted to or not."

"Like nothing we know anything of," commented Nick shrewdly, looking speculatively about.

They were sitting on the south veranda — a long plane sweeping past rows of windows and around the bulging circle of the billiard room. Each chair had been set in its proper place, each cushion plumped, each rug straightened that day — but not by them. Before either of them was awake the steps had been washed — by some one else. Some one else was rolling the tennis court over by the road for them to play on; some one else was bringing vegetables up from the garden for them to eat. Nick's car, cleaned and polished by some one else, stood in the drive. Beside Mildred stood a tea table set with a service of silver, and it was not necessary for them even to pour their own tea for Wicks hovered in the offing to do it if required. Certainly work was not one of the things they knew anything about.

"Even if we chose the same thing we wouldn't be together," said Mildred rather wistfully; "they always send the boys and girls on different trains. Why, Alice West never saw any one she knew the whole year!"

"What did Alice choose?"

"She couldn't decide so they put her into one of those botanical experiment stations and she spent most of her time taking care of new sorts of beans and peas, measuring the water she gave them and keeping the temperature just right and feeding them a lot of different stuff to see what would happen. She told me she was a sort of plant nurse. She liked it a lot though, and Tommy West told me she was going to some college to learn about plant chemistry — only her mother doesn't want her to."

Nick's finger was traveling down the column speculatively.

"I'd hate to work on a railroad or sort letters in a post office. I suppose in the Forestry you'd nurse the trees the way Alice West did the beans and peas. No — now that I think of it, Wicks told me what you do in that — say, Wicks," he called, "come and tell us about the Forestry Service."

The footman was much embarrassed. It is one thing to talk to a young gentleman, man to man, when you are going to a fire with him in the middle of the night, and quite another to stand in your distinguishing but not honorable uniform and tell a lovely young girl whom you serve, and her quite obviously accepted lover about the greatest year in your life — and that so small a thing compared with what they may expect for themselves! But after a moment Wicks forgot himself in telling what it meant for him to be living with boys who had come from every other part of the country — to have been given the sort of academic training he could have got in no other way — training in the structure of trees, in the cell theory of growth, in the lives of insects and their habits.

"Why, I just got to see how it was the world was goin' on — trees and insecs and the way the rocks happened,

too. You can't never feel the same about anything again."

And the thing that the footman didn't say in words, but which was implied in every syllable — and he became very much less of a footman as he did it — was the great difference it made for him not to be working for any one individual but for everybody together.

"Uncle Sam's a great old boss," he said.

When Wicks had become the footman again and carried away their tea, Nick went on studying the blanks discontentedly.

"If they'd let me run an automobile I'd like it well enough — if the roads were decent." Then he stopped suddenly. "I *might* do that!"

"Do what?"

"Road making — it's got something to do with automobiles anyway."

"Oh, Nick!"

"Well, I would like to know about them — why they wear out and everything, and from what Wicks says I guess they'd teach me that."

"But road making, Nick!"

"Well, Mildred, I've got to choose something, you know."

They argued the matter for days and got more fun being together because they had something new to talk about. They could set their teeth into the fact that they *had* to go into the Service whether they wanted to or not. And just at the last moment when the blanks had to be returned to the government, Nick did make road making his first choice and Mildred registered for agriculture.

CHAPTER V

MILDRED stood before the dressing table in her New York home fingering the government order for her departure. Wicks had already carried her bag down to the motor and Henriette stood patiently holding out her traveling coat. But Mildred was quite deaf to the low voices of her assembled kinsfolk floating up from the lower hall, or to the rattle and whirr of the motor trucks hurrying back and forth on the north side of Washington Square. She knew it was time to start but she was fully occupied in trying to wink the tears out of her eyes and swallow the choke out of her voice before she faced her relatives. It was with a visible effort that she raised her firm little chin and let Henriette lay the coat over her shoulders.

She stopped again at the top of the stairs with her hand on the long, curving mahogany rail and looked down. If she had merely been going to China these relatives wouldn't have been here to bid her good-by — this, she knew, was much more special. She got a sudden composite impression as though she saw them in perspective for the first time. They had always been distinct individuals to her before, — Aunt Millicent, tall, stately and a little ponderous, as one who entertains princes has a right to be, Great-Uncle Andrew Carver, thin and droopy as to mustache and shoulders but with an inevitable sartorial perfectness; Winthrop, who had served in the army in France and carried himself straight and square in spite of his limp; David and Lucille, who had been working in

a field hospital; beautiful married cousins in their thirties, whose dinner tables were eminences to be longed after hopelessly by generations of the children of the New-rich; stately men cousins who took their wealth as a means to a serene life and only made excursions into the business world as one might visit the realm of an African king — Mildred saw them for the first time combined, a race of tall, straight, clear-eyed people developed through generations of wealth and culture out of the primitive Anglo-Saxon race stuff. They were dressed with the costly simplicity that is quite indifferent to fashion or display, and they had the simple ways of those who have never had to consider such taken-for-granted things as manners. They did not ask if their ways were the best ways of living and thinking and passing through the world — that went as an axiom. Socially and financially they were a powerful group which, having been started right in the way of investments, bodies, and minds, a century or so back, had been so protected by a specially developed environment, that they had had little need for readjustment since. By the fact that she was going to work Mildred felt herself almost as much outside the family as Wicks waiting immobile to open the door for her.

And the Carvers' family looking up, were also aware that Mildred was set apart from them. Hitherto she had been merely "Frank's oldest girl," now she was the first woman of their line to go to work. Her family saw her as a slender girl with direct blue eyes under dark brows that contrasted sharply with her light hair, a soft full little mouth and a short high nose. She might have been an English girl, so specialized was her type, so adapted to a life where physical exertion was a matter of sport, not money earning; to a life where financial security was

not bought by cleverness or quick thinking, or work, but was an inherited attribute; a life which made no special personal demands beyond that of conforming to the group standards. And she looked like most of her relatives, as though the same heredity and environment had produced the same result in all of them. The Carvers were alike, they liked themselves, they usually married people of their own type.

The Carvers saw Mildred as a family product as inevitable as the blossom on a lily, but set subtly away by herself. How would this flower bear transplanting? Fundamental changes were foreign to the family habit. The Carvers did not even follow the fashions in material things — much less in mental furnishings. They had not been drawn out of Washington Square with the receding tide of fashion. They did not need to depend on the cachet of neighborhoods or costly houses. Financially and socially they were secure. A Carver might do as he liked. What did it matter to them that the tenements crawled up toward the Square? They hardly noticed the stream of Italian immigrants that flowed out of Macdougal Street on bright afternoons or the studios of incoming artists that filled the south side of the Square. They did not even protest against that last brand of a fallen neighborhood — the establishment of a Social Settlement to uplift it. They felt themselves quite detached from personal responsibility outside the line of their blood kin. What more could possibly be expected of them by the community than that their pink magnolias bloomed richly every spring, that their window boxes were set early, and the close clinging vines on the front of their houses trimmed to advantage?

Mildred ran swiftly down the long staircase and they closed up around her with all sorts of fluttering bits of consolation.

"I haven't a doubt you'll find some things about it very interesting — just like being in Egypt or the Argentine."

"Poor dear, it's a shame! I shan't vote for this administration again!"

"They certainly ought to use some discrimination in the people they conscript. It's absurd to make Mildred work just as though Frank weren't willing to make any sort of a contribution instead."

"Do be careful, my dear, and not overdo. Try not to break down your health."

"But you'll soon be back, my dear," cried one of her aunts. "Don't take it so hard! You'll forget that it ever happened."

And the family chorus echoed:

"You'll forget that it ever happened!" as she passed through the door.

As the Carver motor drew up at the Grand Central Station Nicholas Van Arsdale pushed up to it in a state of solemnity not normal to him.

"I hoped," he cried nervously, "that you'd miss the train so I could rush Mildred after it in the racer — got it around the corner on purpose."

"Hullo, Nick," said Mildred, trying to look unconcerned and dabbing her eyes.

As they entered the depot, the great iron gates slid open, an officer shouted, and scores of girls of eighteen began to separate themselves from the crowd and move toward the train. They were of every race, every complexion, every degree of prosperity to be found in New York City. Mrs. Carver caught her hand to her lips as she saw them. And as for the parents — the good burghers of Hamelin must have looked so, yes and have lamented so, too, when the Pied Piper led their darlings away.

"You'd better let me go with Mildred to the gate," suggested Nick. "There's no reason why you should get into that crowd, Mrs. Carver."

Frank Carver caught his daughter to him with almost a sob. It was against every tradition and feeling that he should let her face an unsoftened world.

Nick, reaching to take Mildred's bag from the footman, found Wicks staring straight at his young mistress.

"I hope you'll like the Service as much as I did, miss," he said, with his hand to his cap.

Mildred turned startled.

"Thank you, Wicks," she said, looking into the pleasant eyes of the footman, and then after a moment holding out her hand, grateful for her first greeting from a fellow servant.

But Nick looked at the man with dropped jaw. Not that there was any fault to be found with him, or with his salutation, but it somehow startled him as though a wall had fallen down. He caught Mildred by the arm and pushed on toward the gate.

"Oh, if I were only going now instead of next week!" he said.

He flung a protecting arm around her shoulders as though he could not bear to have the motley crowd press against her, and as they moved forward, he whispered:

"Only a year and we'll both be back again — only a year to wait!"

And at the gate, quite oblivious to the self-restraint customary to a Van Arsdale in the presence of the populace, he kissed her softly and let her go.

CHAPTER VI

"I WISH," said Aunt Millicent, very reproachfully, to the younger members of her family whom she blamed with the present subversive state of the government, "I wish it had been her wedding!"

"Why?" inquired her nephew David with apparent naïveté.

"Why? In spite of the way you excuse all these new things, David — and just because they're new usually — you know as well as I do that girls like Mildred are brought up to be married. The pass things are getting to! I'm always relieved when one of our girls is suitably disposed of! I had believed that when Henry Van Arsdale and his boy took to spending all their summers at Torexo, something would come of it! And now look at this absurd Service!"

"Now, why shouldn't she have a chance to work? Lucille liked her work in the Red Cross! I seem to remember that she preferred it to playing about with her set."

"That's patriotic service — it's entirely different."

Winthrop Carver, another of her nephews, joined the defence.

"Well, isn't the Universal Service patriotic, Aunt Millicent?"

"What! Being a telephone girl or something like that? It's nothing but a scheme of some of those Socialists."

Winthrop, considering his aunt thoughtfully, was

silent. She was magnificently indestructible in an unchangeable world. He had joined the Officers' Reserve Corps at the beginning of the war, had been wounded and sent to a hospital in France, and then back to the front till the finish; but he couldn't face his aunt in an argument.

"Come on, Dave — let's walk up," he said to his cousin.

As the two went down the steps, pretty Anne Weston, a cousin who married into Standard Oil — "and quite unnecessarily too," Aunt Millicent had said — called to them and beckoned her chauffeur:

"Ought you to walk — with your leg?"

"Oh, I get over the ground all right. I can even dance, and David will tell you it ought to be exercised."

David nodded and laughed. The war had caught him when he hadn't been out of college long enough to have settled into any of the dilettante occupations — sport, exploration or travel, — that usually attracted the Carvers. He had enlisted in one of the first hospital units and served as an orderly, carrying stretchers, making beds, scrubbing floors; a beast of burden with a brain that gradually got to working on the problems of hospital organization, and which, in the terrible depletion of the staff under disease, overwork and occasional shell fire, had raised him to the position of unofficial manager and filled him with such pride as neither his family, his fortune nor his Phi Beta Kappa pin had ever raised in him before. The managerial ability with which the first David Carver had organized the trade with the "out islanders" in spices and precious woods, awoke in his descendant, and David passed the latter part of the war getting the biggest result out of the intermittent supplies, the insufficient hospital helpers, the problematical food, under conditions

of heartbreaking overcrowding and overwork. There were times when he himself had done the cooking with no other culinary training than a knowledge of the way things ought to taste when they were done; and other times when he administered an anæsthetic with his heart jumping as high as his collar bone lest he give the victim too much. The harassed hospital unit had learned that it could always rely on David and had put burdens on him accordingly, but long generations of sufficient feeding, without overwork and with the most careful protection from disease, had developed a reserve force which steadied him through the terrific strain.

The two young men swung out of the Square — straight young males of the Carver breed, keen eyed and observant as though the unusual things that the general keying up of the nation had required of them had developed all sorts of latent cutting edges.

"Uncle David said you were going into the mill at Northfield — what's the idea?" Winthrop asked his cousin as they fell into step.

"Oh, Ames, who was head of it for twenty years, died a while back, and there's no one in line for his place."

"Going to manage it yourself?"

"I thought I'd try it out. Cotton cloth is one of the things that need to be made."

"What does your father say?"

David grinned.

"He doesn't understand it at all. He thinks the only object of business is to make money and he knows I don't need to go into it for that."

At the corner of Ninth Street and Fifth Avenue, Winthrop looked up at the old brick house with its Gothic windows.

"Don't you remember seeing Mark Twain come out

of this house? He used to go plodding up the Avenue as though it were a country road. I saw him try to cross right in the face of the traffic once, like a perfectly irresponsible child all dressed up for company in his white suit. A policeman jerked him out just in time and as he set him very carefully down on the pavement I heard him say, 'We can't afford to lose you yet awhile.' Somewhere he wrote that the man who saw that his country's political clothes were worn out and didn't agitate for a new suit was a traitor! Well, we're wearing the new political suit he wanted right now and I'd like to know if he'd be satisfied with the fit. If he were alive I think I'd go up those steps and ask him."

"It takes a war or a humorist to do anything with us humans when we reach a fixed type, doesn't it?"

They went tramping on up the Avenue. After a silence David said:

"It was pretty hard on Aunt Mary and Uncle Frank — having Mildred go. They didn't look exactly happy."

Winthrop looked very grave, for he had a young sister who would go into the Service in two years more.

"Quite a family ceremony they made of it," he said. "Rather like a confirmation or a graduation or an engagement — and when you come to think of it it was a little like them all."

"Speaking of engagements," said David, "didn't we hear some unofficial talk about Mildred and the Van Arsdale boy? I've a notion there's an understanding in the family about it."

"I suppose so! Isn't it just the sort of thing that would suit the aunts down to the last shoe button! But I'm sorry for those two kids. It isn't fair for the family to take a clear case of puppy love and force a marriage out of it, no matter how suitable it may seem to them."

"Well, the boy wasn't there today, anyhow, so perhaps there isn't anything in it, and they may have a chance to grow up first. They may be quite different people after a year of work. I'm curious to know what the Service will do to a girl like Mildred."

As they tramped on up the Avenue the traffic tied itself into knots and then miraculously untied itself again. The great green busses lumbered past with their fresh faced young conductors in the uniform of the Universal Service, country boys getting their first taste of city life under government control. A young letter carrier stopped and puzzled at the address on an envelope. Just as they were passing he looked up imploringly and asked:

"Can either of you-all gentlemen make out this lady's name foh me? Ah'm not ahcustomed to all the languages you-all have in New York City."

David looked at the envelope.

"It's Carvaretti — Italian. She's probably in that office building on the corner."

"Ah'm obliged to you, suh. I saw by the way you-all was walkin' that you'd been in the ahmy an' I knew I could ahsk any gentleman in the Service."

"Sounds like a Virginian accent," Winthrop commented as they went on. "Now, what's happening in Prince Edward and Anne Arundel counties when all the boys and girls go back there after having spent a year with people who haven't any grandfathers, and having done a lot of work not, in their code, to be expected of a lady or gentleman? I imagine it will alter the atmosphere of the dear Southland very perceptibly."

"And won't a lot of Seattle and Tacoma youngsters sent down there for a year stir the place up like an egg beater?"

Fifth Avenue was peppered here and there with the

various Service uniforms — dodging in and out of telegraph stations, riding on the hurrying trucks of the government express and mail wagons, pushing about scrapers in the streets, doing all the bits of unskilled labor that a community does for itself through its government. The work they were doing was in itself essential but with no future of advancement or development in it. But it was no longer done by the old and decrepit for whom it was the last strand in the fraying rope of independence, nor by the inefficient or discouraged middle-aged who had been crowded into it without hope of escape, nor by the unfortunate young forced into it by the immediate need to earn money and finding it a blind alley in which they were trapped — but by well fed, well cared for young people to whom it was nothing more than a training school. And yet both Winthrop and David realized that it was out of those terrible red miles that the world had marched to victory in France, that this new Service of peace which was filling Fifth Avenue had come — as a consequence of that terrible upheaval that the ideal that all work could be a national service had begun to be realized.

North of Twenty-Third Street the flood of garment-workers, their day's work done, bore down upon the two men. There were literally tens of thousands of them, filling the walks in a moving mass, overflowing into the streets when the traffic permitted, tramping steadily south with toes pointed too sharply out and feet clinging flatly to the pavement. As a race they were as thoroughly differentiated as the Carver family. But it was a different specialization. Instead of being tall and clear-skinned from generations of full feeding, care and protection, they were undersized, sallow and stooping from generations of poverty that meant low feeding and the

grinding indoor toil of the landless. Where the Carver family were direct and slow in thought and speech because their survival did not depend on quickness or cleverness, the garment workers were verbally subtle and mentally swift because of the long generations when success, even life itself, had depended on quickness and subtlety. To these thousands of garment-makers, work was nothing better than a hard necessity. From the time they had stood at their mothers' knees to pull bastings, when they rose to be machine operators, pressers, cutters, getting good wages and then down the other side of the hill back to the bastings again and finally working in dim shadowy shops making over second-hand clothes, their object in working had been to make money to live. There was no thought of cutting and sewing and pressing because to make clothes was a public service. They had not had any training in democracy except to cast the ballot — and that was no more than the elder members of the Carver family had had!

There was a striking absence of young men in the crowd or it might have been different. Their sons who had spent a year on railroads, or steamers, or in post offices, or laboratories, or public hospitals, or agriculture, did not look on the job of sitting all day driving parallel edges of cloth through a power machine with any degree of favor. The adventure of serving the community had given them a definite distaste for work which, so far as they could see, was being carried on chiefly for the advantage of some firm. They showed an increasing tendency to go into industries that were better organized, new blood was not coming into the garment trades and the conditions were distinctly bad.

But neither was the new blood of the younger generation of Carvers going into the traditional avocations

of that family. Their young men and women, like the sons and daughters of the needle workers, were being driven out of their inherited environments.

As Winthrop and David passed the Hawarden Club they saw their great-uncle Andrew Carver already at the window, his perfect hat on his perfect head, his perfect but chromatically repressed tie vanishing at exactly the proper angle under his quietly distinguished waistcoat, his pleasantly quizzical eyes fixed on them. Beside him sat David's father, David Senior, and Henry Van Arsdale. The three were often together. Old Andrew had been fond of the younger men when they were small boys in kilts running about in the gardens at Torexo, fond of them when their sons and daughters took their turn in the family cradles; he was fond of them now that the time when those cradles would be filled with their grandchildren could not be far off.

"Why don't you put those two lads up for the club?" asked Henry Van Arsdale.

Andrew Carver, drumming absently on his chair arm, nodded to the boys through the window.

"Neither of the boys seems to care about joining."

"What!" Henry Van Arsdale turned to his friend in consternation, "not want to get into the Hawarden?"

"I felt just the way you sound about it till I had a talk with my son," put in David Senior. "It's the confounded Service at the bottom of it all — levels off all the things we used to care so much about."

"The Service? Oh, come now! Plenty of young men want to get into the club even if our boys don't."

Andrew turned to them with a smile. "Have you noticed the waiting list?" he asked significantly.

"Not recently."

They strolled over to the bulletin board — eleven

names! And there used to be a double column of them as long as the board! Henry Van Arsdale ran his finger down the list.

"Not one under forty unless it's these two I don't know."

"Well?" queried Andrew as they came back.

"What does it mean?"

"They tell me that the clubs where engineers and chemists and such like men belong are so crowded that you can't find room to lunch!"

It was Apperson Forbes who volunteered the comment. He was an elderly young man, as sartorially unexceptionable as Andrew Carver whose disciple he was. But Apperson Forbes had inherited the New England habit of developing bone, and his superlative clothes had something the effect of being hung on a rack. His features were interestingly blocked in with vertical and horizontal lines — straight up and down nose and chin, straight across mouth, eyelids and brow — and his hair, which was more or less limited, went up square from his ears and across. Apperson Forbes had a theory, on which he acted consistently, that there was no particular advantage in being rich unless you could have more fun than other people. Old Andrew was the only existing Carver who appreciated the peculiar variety of fun that appealed to Apperson — and his subsequent frankness about it — he had a predilection for talking things out. Did it not increase the amusingness of life?

"I know that David is trying to get into some club of medical men and hasn't been able to make it yet," said David Senior, as he settled slowly back into his chair. "And now he's going into business."

"Oh, really? I should think he'd hardly started his life yet!"

David Carver shot a look of distaste at the unconscious Apperson Forbes and Andrew grinned.

"I've told my son," David Senior continued, "that there isn't any reason why he should go into business — even if the income tax has been very much increased all the stocks are paying well again. But he acted as though I was a child he'd got to instruct. Told me that just looking at things didn't interest him any more. He insisted that so far as having one exciting thing happen after another, nothing could seem dramatic after the war. But he admitted that it was going to be more interesting than anything ever was in the world before, to tidy up the big mess, now the war's done, and get the world going again. And he seemed to think it was up to him to help on that job — to take over the Northfield Mill, specifically. It doesn't sound sane to me, but I guess I'm growing old."

Apperson Forbes ran a long rectangular finger across his horizontal lips. "What fun does he think he'll get out of that? Aren't there plenty of men with nothing better to do than work? Somebody ought to preserve the — ah — taste for — ah — entertainment. If a man feels he's got to do something, politics is more amusing than most — here's Senator Train as an example of that."

"How do you do, Senator," cried Old Andrew, rousing himself. "How is the life of a statesman satisfying you these days?"

"Badly. Politics isn't the leisure class occupation I found it before the war — the younger generation keeps us awake. How do, Henry — Hullo, David — Why, I was going up the steps of the Capitol last week and there was my Madeline using some sort of hydraulic apparatus all pipes and sprays and motors, to wash them. I didn't know the girl had been sent there, but she'd just been pro-

moted to the District of Columbia Building Cleaning Squad — and very proud of it too! Well, when that young minx caught sight of me she called out that she'd been told to get everything off the steps that didn't belong there and turned a stream on me that fairly washed me off my feet. Fact! I'd rescued my hat and was just getting up when along came the officer in charge and started to march her away for misconduct. Of course I told him she was my daughter, so it was all right, and begged him to say nothing about it. But he wouldn't! He said he hadn't any discretion in the matter and that he'd be severely reprimanded if he let it pass. Well, I couldn't let it go at that, so I went to headquarters and explained who I was — laid it on so thick that I was ashamed of myself, and tried to get her off. They investigated of course — called up everybody from the man who invented the hydraulic cleaner to the ghost of the architect who built the steps, but there didn't seem to be any question about the facts, so they stood by their gang boss. Then I got mad — told them it was a fine country where a father couldn't do the punishing of his own daughter if she needed it — told them what I thought about a senator not having any more influence than the chief stair scrubber — I'm not sure I didn't try to bribe everybody in sight, and the only satisfaction I could get was the answer that as she wasn't working for me but for the United States I had no responsibility in the matter. So they disciplined her. But I don't think she minded it half so much as I did."

As soon as the senator could make an excuse he went in search of another group to tell his story to. Henry Van Arsdale found himself wondering more and more about Nick who had been summoned for the following week. The boy had never shown any alarming predi-

lection for work. Of course, he hadn't been encouraged in it, but he didn't think he would have any difficulty in keeping Nick in the state of idleness to which God seemed to have called him. Did he want to keep him there? He hesitated a little. The life he himself had led was so safe and when Nick married Mildred — but would he marry her now? A year of separation at this time might stop it all and with Nick's six weeks' experience of being in love, and a taste for it developed, what other object for his affections might he not find in a year! Oh, that the Service which so distressingly multiplied the uncertainty of the future, just when it has settled itself suitably, had never been established!

But still the talk went on around them.

"My son has been in the coast survey and it's got the young beggar so he's bound to take up geodetics as a life work."

"What do you suppose my daughter is up to? Going into the advertising business! When she was working in a post office in Utah she couldn't get a lot of things she wanted — they weren't there at all, and she felt it was because they hadn't been properly advertised."

"And so she's going to see that they're advertised so as to hit the bucolic brain?"

"The specialized bucolic brain of the Utah mountains — and because the people ought to have the things!"

There was some laughter, but a lot of shamefaced pride was growing up in these bewildered parents.

And while David Carver and Henry Van Arsdale thought of their sons, old Andrew Carver saw a picture of Mildred coming down the same stairs on which he had seen her grandmother so many times. He saw her as her grandmother had been, one of the luxuries of life, an ornament, a grace, a rare flower grown in the hothouse

of family and tradition, a goldfish in a globe of wealth. He could imagine her as she might have been in the seventies, in an open carriage with a tiny parasol to shade her eyes, or in the full skirts and great sleeves that came later or the little tight dresses of the new century, and always beautiful and smart, a lady in the Carver interpretation of the word, a family product absolutely true to type. But the companion picture to this showed him Mildred pushed up against the hard facts of the world that no woman of their line had been permitted to meet for five generations, Mildred working just like the girls in the shops or the offices or the factories, and it filled him with no simple set of emotions. For Andrew Carver had acquaintances among women in various walks of life and found that other characteristics besides those distinctive of his kinswomen were also good. And though part of him revolted at the thought of his grandniece being set into the unspecialized mass of humanity that filled most of the world, another part of him could see that the result might not be wholly bad. But Andrew did not see Mildred's year in the Service as anything more significant than an adventure, an experience, as Frank might have taken her to Siam or taught her to run an aëroplane. He had not sensed the possibility of work as a changer of character though he appreciated the effect of experience as an addition to charm. And as he remembered the shadow of Mildred's eyelashes on her smooth cheek, the soft upcurve of her lips, the trim little brown shoe vanishing into the motor as she went away, he concluded that the additional charm of experience was quite unnecessary. But still Old Andrew, half somnolent in the club window, recognized that while marriage — and he had heard Millicent speak of the Van Arsdale boy — would be a safe solution, still, even girls seemed

to have a taste for adventure, and it was at least a question whether parents and relations had the right to protect them against what they might enjoy so much.

CHAPTER VII

MILDRED CARVER, climbing up the steps of the tourist sleeper, entered a new world. From the quiet serenity of the house in Washington Square; from her gracious soft-voiced kinsfolk; from the tempered light and the restrained colors, she came into an unshaded glare, striking across bare cane seats and uncarpeted aisles, and lighting the gay inharmonious clothes of the girls who filled every seat from door to door.

Mildred's individuality, which she had just begun to be conscious of as the Service detached her from her family, was submerged again when she found herself but one of forty girls of eighteen, in a car which was itself but a single unit in a train of seven precisely similar cars, all filled with precisely similar girls going on exactly the same journey for the same purpose.

There was not much talking in the car. The girls were all feeling the wrench of being cut off from the various worlds they knew, and the people and things they loved. But as the train hurried along the sense of adventure began to wrestle with their homesickness. Like polyps cut off from the parent stem, they were set drifting independently in the great current. All the dreams and trailing clouds of their childhood had brought them to the edge of this adventure. They were taking the first step toward what might be the realization of the old golden dream of the Fairy Prince and the Magic Palace and all the consequent little princelings; or of the Career

which must spell itself in Capitals; or of the wealth which might be variously interpreted as four-rooms-and-a-bath in Harlem or an estate on Long Island with relays of automobiles and a landscape gardener imported from Holland direct.

For all of them the tourist sleeper speeding northward was the beginning of *something* and the car fairly quivered with the expectation and suspense of it all. Thickly beset with the weight of adult existence, these rows of commonplace girls sat silently in their seats and looked furtively about to take stock of their neighbors.

" Say, ain't it fun going away like this? "

Mildred turned with a start to the girl beside her.

" My Ma she says it's ignorant to cry like the whole family was laid in their coffins, but I bet she's doin' it herself yet. My Ma, she's that fond of me you wouldn't believe there's five more she's got."

The girl straightened her too small white hat with its too long black feather, pulled up the collar of her bright blue waist and dried her eyes.

" This I gotta say about it anyway, a grand chance to travel like we was livin' uptown we got."

She opened her gay little bag and taking out her mirror began quite frankly to whiten her large nose and redden her full lips.

" Some time I guess we gotta keep traveling? "

" Yes," said Mildred slowly, " it's two days and a night to Minneapolis."

The girl stopped with her powder puff in her hand and looked her over carefully.

" Say, like uptown you talk yourself. Would you tell me what your name is? "

" Mildred Carver."

It wasn't an interpretation to the other girl. The

Carver family antedated the newer holders of the limelight in the newspapers and she had never heard of them.

"Pleased to meet you! My name's Miss Mamie Epstein. Say, ain't this like the Fourth Avenue? I didn't know it 'ud be the same as goin' home at six o'clock only you get a seat."

Mamie flattened herself against the window as they crossed Harlem River.

"Up here I'm going to live myself sometime. I'm going to get off the East Side."

And she looked with envious determination at the group of mushroom apartment buildings carrying permanent painted signs, "FOUR ROOMS AND BATH — ALL MODERN IMPROVEMENTS — APPLY TO JANITOR."

"My Ma she says I should stop knockin' Orchard Street, but she don't know, for nothing else but Russia she ain't never seen. Say, over there before they had the Revolution it was fierce! If the Czar told you a egg was black you dassent give him no argument. My father said so himself. But I seen how it is uptown. My lady friend's sister she married a uptown man. He don't admit how one should be a wage slave and you can believe me or not, my lady friend's sister she's got a whole house. — I seen it myself. She can talk refined like anything. Ever since I was to see her, I threw a hate on the East Side. 'Leah!' I says, to my lady friend, 'we ain't got to stand for no East Side forever. I guess what Mary done we can do. Cheer up,' I says, 'there's plenty of rich uptown fellows left; their names is in the papers every day.' Ain't it, yes?"

Mildred Carver was shocked. She was a well brought up member of the upper class where if they didn't marry for love they at least put up a consistent bluff about it.

She had never dreamed of such conversational frankness as this. Much heralded heiresses might indeed acquire titles by way of the altar, but then much heralded heiresses weren't considered exactly the proper thing by the Carvers to whom money was a taken-for-granted possession like two legs. To them it seemed as vulgar to talk about the fortune one of their daughters might expect, as to advertise the number of her teeth. Where everybody had plenty was it not base to marry for more? With Nick's parting kiss still on her lips she could not excuse Miss Mamie Epstein's sordid attitude toward marriage. Why, marriage was just because you loved somebody, and that was kind of a poem you said over and over to yourself and never told anybody anything about. Of course, merely being engaged was different!

Mildred was startled by a voice on the other side. A girl with bobbed hair and a picture gown was leaning across the aisle to her. Her hat with its stenciled band was in her lap and her short hair was bound with an orange fillet.

"Don't you think we should organize a protest against the way these windows stick? I have tried to raise mine and I can't make it budge. It's high-handed enough of the government to conscript us against our will without being suffocated the very first thing! I don't think they have any right to take away our liberty like this!"

All that Mildred comprehended was that the girl wanted the window open.

"Let me help you," she said, rising.

The protesting one's seat mate seemed a silent soul and merely moved aside with a murmured, "Yes, ma'am," as the two girls struggled with the window.

"Suppose you let me do it."

A tall, square girl with a rough tweed jacket like a

boy's bent to get her shoulder under the top of the sash and straightening, sent the window up with a bang. Then she swung round into the aisle, thrust her hands into her jacket pockets and stood balancing herself with her feet wide apart. She had strong brown hair which rippled away from her broad, low forehead. The heavy eyebrows above her gray eyes were black. She had a wide sweet mouth, and very big, very white teeth. Her hands and her feet were large, but there was a deft firmness about her long fingers and about her big body, that made one think of some great machine.

"There, that makes me feel free again!" said the girl with the bobbed hair. "Not that I was much too warm, but it wasn't right not to have it come open if you wanted it to. I suppose outrages like this will happen to us the whole way. I *know* they will under this barbarous militaristic system!"

Mamie Epstein leaned forward and spoke across the car:

"You listen like you didn't want to come?"

"Want to? Of course not. Why should I want to have my career interrupted like this? I *don't believe* in governments anyway. Oh, if they carry it much further, they will find how powerless they really are when the people all rise up as one man and say 'Stop!'"

"Well, on work I can't say I'm any more stuck than you are. I been working and I guess I know. But for working in the Service nobody ain't goin' to look at you sarcastic, 'cause they all got to do it, see? It don't make no difference if you got a million dollars or just ten cents, you gotta work just the same."

The short haired girl shook with rage.

"It isn't the work at all. I *glory* in work. Only nobody ought to be in the position to *make* me do it. I

want work that will express me. I'd love it. It would be the greatest privilege."

"Humm," said Mamie Epstein conclusively, "to praise up work you ain't got no license. Gee, I can't shake work too soon to suit myself."

The short haired girl turned to her window in evident despair at making herself understood, and Mamie, quite unsubdued, said to Mildred:

"I bet you ain't never worked?"

The remark was a question and Mildred hesitated.

"Well, no, I'm afraid I haven't."

The tall girl lounged against the back of Mildred's seat considering the girl in the picture gown thoughtfully.

"Where in New York do you live?" she asked quietly.

The picture girl shook her short hair and answered defiantly:

"I live with my brother — he's an artist. We've got a studio apartment on the south side of Washington Square. He's Arthur Forsythe, — you probably know his work."

"Oh, yes,— doesn't he do those perfectly stunning girls on the covers of the Saturday Evening Post?"

"But those are only pot boilers he throws off occasionally," cried Ellen Forsythe quickly. "His real work is interpretative color arrangements, — everybody is perfectly *mad* about them — they're *wonderful.*"

"Where does he show them?"

"In the studio. He wouldn't *think* of letting a dealer have them, — the atmosphere wouldn't be right. They're purely individual expressions."

"Expressions of what?"

"Why, of personality, of course!"

"What do you *do* with them?"

"*Do* — Oh! Good Gracious! Why, surround your-

self with them of course — get inspired by them — let them permeate your being."

"But what do they look like?"

"Look like! Look like! Well, that shows what the bourgeoisie are! Don't you know that what they look like depends entirely on how you feel?"

Mamie Epstein's mouth had dropped open. Mildred felt as though somebody was trying a new serve on her. Only the tall girl had the self command not to be cowed and asked — though not quite so confidently:

"Are you an artist, too?"

"I'm going to be when this awful year is over."

It was Mamie Epstein who came to the rescue. She couldn't place Ellen Forsythe in her scheme of the universe. She knew Washington Square, because in moments of affluence or during the incipient courtship of some "gentleman friend," she occasionally took the bus there for a ride uptown and back; she had seen not only the awnings run out from the houses on the north side but also the Italian-filled benches "like it was Hester Street — believe me." But she looked at Ellen Forsythe, at her clothes of a kind quite unknown to her garment-making circle and quite unpurchasable in shops, at her short hair done in no fashion advocated by the Woman's Page of the Sunday paper, at her flat heelless shoes, and felt that she compared very unfavorably from a sartorial standpoint with her own cheap smartness — and yet her accent was distinctly "swell." Mamie turned confidently to the two other girls:

"I bet you're uptown," she said.

"I live in Washington Square, too," said Mildred, "not very far from Miss Forsythe."

"We live in 113th Street, — up near the University. My father's in the science department of Columbia. He's Professor Ralph Ansel."

"Oh!" said Mildred brightening, "then aren't you Ruth Ansel? And isn't it your brother that plays on the same hockey team with Nick Van Arsdale? I thought I'd seen you at the games. I'm Mildred Carver."

To Ruth Ansel the name conveyed all that Mamie Epstein and Ellen Forsythe would have liked to know. But she did not show it. She too lived in a little aristocracy of her own; not perhaps as exclusive or well established as the one where Mildred belonged, but far more amusing. And these two aristocracies were contiguous, — there was constant intercourse between them, — not on equal terms — Oh no! Neither would have admitted that. Both sides felt that the other must know that they condescended — both sides admitted it themselves, so it must be true.

The four girls settled into a group and began a tentative testing out of each other — a sort of preliminary alignment for what was coming. Already they were beginning to realize that whatever demands might be made on them, no family nor friends could piece out their efforts, — they must stand on their own feet.

To Mildred the idea of work was full of terrifying allurement. What would it be like? What would they find she was able to do? Thinking over the eighteen years of her life she realized her distinct limitations. She could play a pretty good game of tennis. Her French and Italian were fair. She had a certain amateurish but very sincere interest in the little she knew of the physical sciences. As for sewing, Henriette had done everything of that sort for her. Of course she could drive an automobile. She was conscious of being able to do that excellently well and she knew about most of the things that could happen to its interior. She had even helped to put on the tires. How far would these acquirements

take her in the unexplored continent of the Service? She had no idea what the dangers and delights of it were, but she was perfectly willing to experience them. Mildred did not know whether she was enthusiastic about work or not, but she knew she was anxious to find out.

The whole car had begun to buzz. The forty girls were becoming conscious of the bond of their new adventure and were eager to talk about it. No one would have thought that they had so much in common, for there was every sort of face, every sort of dress, and every sort of manner. And they were further differentiated from each other by the loving care of their sorrowing parents which had decked them with all kinds of inappropriate finery for the occasion. Now as they began to try and impress each other, all their little vanities of person or place or possession cropped out. New and mostly cheap traveling bags were opened ostentatiously. Bracelets clinked, chains and beads were fingered. "My father's business" — "my married sister" — "my rich-off cousin" — "our victrola" — all were talked about for the benefit of the car. And then the Universal Service sergeant began a slow progress of instruction from seat to seat, — dinner would be served them on the train, — the porter would make up the berths at nine o'clock — the girl whose surname came first in the alphabet would take the lower berth — "hang your skirts on the hooks, put your hats and shoes into the nets," — a whole series of things she told them that came as needed instruction, for about three-fourths of the girls had never been in a sleeping car before. The sergeant left behind her a trail of giggling wonder.

When Mildred, wrapped in her little silk kimono, was ready to slip into her berth she found Mamie Epstein standing frightened in the aisle.

"Up to that little shelf how should I get myself? Sure I think it shuts up on me! In the night if I roll over what will I do? Rather I would sleep sitting up, believe me!"

Mildred was anxious to let Mamie have the lower berth, but the car sergeant was rigid in her discipline and Mamie was forced to climb up the ladder to her place. But Mildred was conscious, as long as she stayed awake, of two feet hanging down over the edge of the berth, and realized that Mamie, too frightened to lie down, was sitting on the edge holding on with both hands.

They breakfasted at Buffalo. Everybody knows the long, low Government eating room with lunch counters around a great square. The hungry girls, each with her government order in her hand, filed in and sat about on the high stools. They were served by lads in khaki, also in the government service, and Mamie Epstein, who had a catholic taste in acquaintance, advanced conversationally upon the one who pushed their food toward them. To her it seemed that introductions could just as well be made by oneself as by anybody else — better in fact because obviously one knew oneself better.

"Gee, Charlie, this is fierce coffee — cold too! Say, can't you give us eggs that's been nearer the stove than what the ice-box is?"

Mildred blushed with embarrassment that one should find fault with what was offered. But the boy turned back to them laughing:

"Well, ma'am," he drawled, "Ah reckon youah disposition would cook most anything you was to apply it to. Shall ah serve you a egg raw?"

After one blank moment, Mamie giggled, then seated herself more firmly on the revolving stool.

"Smarty! Believe me, it's some little trip from New

York and we ain't half there yet. I could travel forever just looking out of the window, but my lady friend here — let me make you acquainted with Miss Carver — she don't care about it a'tall."

The young man held out his hand gravely to Mildred.

"It's an honah to meet you, Miss Ca'vah. Ah you also from New York City?"

He lounged his six feet of Southern mountaineer across the counter until the officer called him sharply to his work; but at the next pause he turned back to talk with them again, or rather to listen to Mamie Epstein who chattered like a squirrel about everything in the world.

"Say, ain't he grand?" cried Mamie when they were back on the train. "Ain't his voice just swell? The way he kind of smooths all the words together like there wasn't any stops between them makes you feel like you was Mrs. Vanderbilt. Understand me?"

"These Southerners," said Ellen Forsythe, "are really an undeveloped race. They still believe in the subjection of women. They haven't the slightest understanding of the feminist movement. All they think of is if you're pretty or not. I think it's a great disadvantage for a woman to be good looking. It just fogs the issue all the time. Of course being artistic is entirely different. That's everybody's duty but just mere beauty is hardly worth having."

Mamie looked her over carefully from her sloping shoulders to her flat-heeled shoes and there was nothing but disapproval in her look.

"You should worry," she said calmly.

The remark appeared to strain relations for a time although it obviously emanated from a difference of taste; Mamie striving personally to approach her ideal of plump high colored compactness and Ellen Forsythe

holding up before herself that willowy picturesqueness, the apotheosis of a waving corn leaf, which she strove to realize. Mildred, on the impulse of a life saver, threw herself into the talk with unaccustomed vigor and tried to make it seem as though Mamie's clear voiced remark was merely an illusion of the ear. It was so evident that Miss Mamie Epstein hadn't intended to be rude, but that hitherto her social experience hadn't demanded much tact.

"What did you register for?" Mildred asked Ruth Ansel hurriedly.

"Oh, a whole string of things — everything I wanted to do all at once so they wouldn't have any excuse to send me into an office — mining and forestry and transportation and agriculture were the first four."

"I registered just for agriculture and transportation. What was yours?" she asked Mamie Epstein.

"When I ain't done any of 'em anyway, how should I know? I just said *not* working by cloaks and suits or kimonos or anything to sew. I'll be working by them all my life anyway if I don't get me no up-town feller."

"I wouldn't register for anything," Ellen Forsythe volunteered. "If the Government steals my productive labor for a year they can't expect me to help them decide what to do with it."

"Well, we all seem to have drawn agriculture, anyway."

"But I don't see —" Mildred began.

The train stopped with a disconcerting suddenness and the girls pressed against the windows. They had come to a repair gang working on the road. As the train pulled slowly ahead the lines of workmen smiled up at the girls, took off their soft felt hats and called greetings and most of the girls laughed and shouted back and tried

to get the windows open so that they could talk more easily, for the railroad gang was largely made up from the Universal Service and there was a natural free-masonry among them. In charge were trained railroad makers, under them a group of graduates of the Service who had chosen to go on with the work, and in the lowest grade a group of raw Service lads doing the unskilled work of shoveling gravel and pushing wheelbarrows and carrying material back and forth. For this was a government road, and the community commanded enough unskilled labor — temporarily unskilled because it had not yet found its place in industry — so that the old type of permanently unskilled laborer was rarely found except in remote uncontrolled industries and showed a tendency to disappear altogether. The big fact of their joint service to the State made these boys and girls friendly at once.

"Pretty busy, aren't you?" called Ruth Ansel, leaning through the window she had wrenched open.

"Sure," came back a rich Irish voice. "Makin' the road safe for democracy to say nothin' of bracin' it up so you won't get yourselves broke going by."

"Do you like it?" she called to another as the train gathered way.

"You bet," came the response.

"Where you-all going?" called a soft voiced, dark eyed lad.

"Going to Minneapolis," shouted Mamie Epstein.

"That might be the mills," said a young Scandinavian understandingly. "Give the city my love, — unless you'd like to keep it yourself."

Mamie made a face at him.

"Ain't you got a nerve!" she cried.

Ellen Forsythe raised her chin scornfully, and Mil-

dred felt herself out of the charted coasts of her social experience. But at least here was some sort of an anchorage. "We're making the road safe for you." Of course! She hadn't thought about work as getting something done. She was going to do it because the government made her, but she hadn't hitherto considered the object of the work itself. When poor men worked it was, of course, to earn money to live on; when rich men worked it was because they wanted more money than they already had; when women worked it was because they were so unfortunate as not to have any man to work for them. Work was because people had to get money. But here was work not to get money but because the thing you were doing had to be done! To Mildred, utterly innocent of any sort of economic theory and knowing only the part of the world that spent money instead of earning it, it all seemed very wonderful. And as she continued to think about it, quite touchingly beautiful too, but no more comprehensible than the principles of metabolism. She tried to reason about it, but her mind didn't focus easily at such a depth; so she turned to Mamie Epstein, who was crowded close against the window, entranced by the hurrying procession of Ohio fields.

"Do you think we'll know how to do what they want us to do?" she asked tentatively.

"Well, it's up to them, ain't it?"

"I — I suppose it is. But if it's something that's got to be done and we can't do it — "

"The boss'll find that out, you bet!"

"Yes, but if it's got to be done right away and we can't do it — "

"Then we gotta learn it, and you can get by with a lot, too."

Mildred felt instinctively that Mamie hadn't grasped

the idea. She hadn't got it clear herself, but she felt certain that there was an idea in it, and that she might have a chance of grasping it if she once saw it clearly. She was quite sure that Nick had not seen it — that he didn't even know that it was there. Why, she hadn't known it was there a day ago herself — and now look at the way she felt about it! But Nick, — why, when they set Nick to some sort of work he would do it because he had to, not because it was something that needed to be done. He would be perfectly dear about it, and he wouldn't shirk or anything, but how he would hate it! Hadn't they talked it over together again and again? Wasn't work, the Universal Service especially, a hard duty, a requisition, a tax, a horrible obstacle set between them and what they wanted to do?

And as Mildred went on with the unaccustomed occupation of trying to think it through, there came to her a sort of picture, very faint and blurred as though it hadn't been fully developed on the film of her mind, of a whole people working together for the things that they all needed to have. And just by virtue of this vision, dim and misty as it was, the aversion with which she had entered the Service vanished and she was filled with a tremulous delight in the new adventure in which she — Mildred Carver, an independent, free swimming human being — was embarked; and she knew way down in the bottom of that soul that she was just beginning to be conscious of, that she wouldn't give up the chance of it, — no, not for anything that the world had yet seen fit to offer her, beloved daughter of the rich and great as she was.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was dark when the girls reached Minneapolis. Automobile busses carried them out through the bright streets where tiny box trees showed green about the tops of the lamp posts; out beyond the crowded part of the city; past a little lake, like a mislaid hand mirror, to a group of long two-story buildings. The quartermaster of their company met them at the door with a manner compounded of that of a school teacher, a trained nurse and a shop forelady, and the girls filed in with their bags and looked about in every sort of surprise. To not one of them was this great room the sort of place they had expected to live in. Dark wood tables stood down the middle of it with shaded lamps upon them. The dull red curtains blowing strongly on the night wind were the same color as the stenciled frieze that ran around the top of the gray plaster wall, the same color as the cushions on the long seats under the windows, and as the covers on the tops of the low bookcases. It was comfortable, it was almost beautiful, it was only like an institution in that it smelled a little of soap and the corners of the floor were rounded so that it could be cleaned by the simple process of turning on the hose. But it was not like anything that any of them had ever considered as home.

Mildred saw it against the living places of the Carver family — the high stately rooms, the lovely textures, and the costly furnishings. Mamie Epstein compared it with the four-room home up three flights of stairs which

housed her father, mother, five brothers and sisters and herself — a place huddled with imitation brass beds, cheap lace curtains, chenille portières, photographs in color which represented to Mamie the last word in Art, gilt clocks, vases, ornaments and an insistent cheap profusion under untempered gaslight. Ellen Forsythe, standing critically aloof with an antagonistic eye traveling back and forth, was heard to snap the single condemnatory word — "Bourgeois!"

To the girls who were used to cafeterias, the supper that night did not seem a strange thing. The practical education in table manners of the working girl who lunches in restaurants helped them through; but for those who had no experience of eating except in their own homes it was a trying occasion. Still to have something to do after the long physical inaction of their journey, even if it was only to take up their trays and file through the kitchen for their food, was a relief to them all. It was a relief too for them to get into their white cots and find themselves on something stationary with no rumble in their ears.

Mildred went to sleep, after the whispering had died down in the dormitory, with the forlorn feeling of an unassimilated little atom wandering over the surface of the earth by itself. She felt poignantly that she and all the other girls were quite unrelated, that their only connection was the purely external fact that, happening to be the same age, they had come from New York on the same train, and were sleeping now in the same room. Nothing had yet bound them together. Even their clothes were mutually antagonistic. Mildred's little French cloak and trim hat hung on the rack at the foot of her bed, opposite was Mamie Epstein's bright blue dress, and further off the boyish suit of Ruth Ansel, and

all down the room a very medley of garments, — clothes not to be worn again for many months.

The girls were waked in the morning by the clanging of a bell, followed by the entrance of the quartermaster, saying:

"Good morning, girls."

Blonde and brune, they sat up in their beds and answered her.

"Come to me in the store room — that door there — one at a time and get your uniforms. The girl in the first cot may come first."

The whole dormitory watched as the first girl slipped out after the quartermaster. She came back presently with an armful of clothes — everything from hat to shoes, and as she carried them down the room, the other girls reached out to stop her, and finger them, and exclaim.

After breakfast when they were formed in line in the courtyard there appeared a new thing in the world, a fresh creation — the Forty-second Unit of the Eleventh Corps of the National Agricultural Service, — and marched away up the street. They had come there as individuals in all the colors of the rainbow; in all the fashions that different purses and stages of æsthetic development permitted; showing at the first glance all sorts of breeding and circumstance, sartorially embodied, — but they marched down the street that first morning as a unit, having taken on the surface democracy of the Service uniform, the khaki, the brown frieze, the square brown boots and soft felt hats, and so become part of a thing which was bigger and better than any of them working alone could ever be.

Mildred, taking her place in the line, had a quick vision of another procession in which she would be the chief

figure, — a procession where she would walk up the aisle in the little church in Torexo Park with her satin train following after and her grandmother's lace veil trailing softly. Bridesmaids in blue would be stepping on ahead, and there would be the music of the organ and the perfume of the flowers, and all the people turning their heads to see, and way up ahead the rector and, — yes, of course, — Nick, probably looking frightened and ridiculous, waiting for her. All this wedding procession Mildred arranged and experienced as they were getting the step,— left, left, left, — but it faded quite obediently away as she fell into the rhythm of the company going to work, and her steps beat out an insistent questioning, — why? why? why? The underlying motif of all this work eluded her. No one in any part of her past life was the interpreter she needed. And so, still bewildered, she marched with her company out to the great flour mill which the government had taken over in response to the demand of the Farmers' Non-Partisan League after the food shortage of 1918.

The mill, rising like a tawny brick cliff set on the high banks that held in the river, offered long rows of clear windows to the east. Inside, the sun laid great slow-moving squares of light upon the floors, gilded the whirling machines and turned the floating flour dust into pyramids and prisms of impalpable gold. The girls were formed in line by the sergeant of their unit, — a long brown-clad row with their likenesses far more evident than their differences. Mildred at the far end waited nervously. Why did she have to be there? She had come because she had been drafted, but what good did it do? What was it for? Why had the government drafted her?

And then the door opened and some one came in. His

silhouette showed clear against the window — tall and thin with small, compact head and marked features. He swung toward them, stopped opposite the middle of the line and smiled. It was a smile that parted his thin lips over his white teeth, that crinkled up the corners of his eyes and even seemed to curl the ends of his dark hair, — a smile so full of sincerity and happiness and appreciation, and so comprehendingly sweet, that it would never have been possible to any woman of the sheltered old school and to very few men, because it was the smile of some one who had seen the world as it really is — the great masses of splendor and progress, and the thin black sediment of shame and inertia — and had found it good. He looked down the line of girls and for each one his smile was a personal greeting — not the greeting of a boss, or a brother, certainly not of the potential lover, but of a new thing that was just coming into the world between men and women — the greeting of the fellow servant.

"Girls," said John Barton, and his voice was an infinitely pleasant Yankee drawl, "I'm glad to welcome you into the Agricultural Service. This may not look like agriculture to you, but you are here to help provide bread for the people of all the world. It's almost the most important thing there is to do. The folks that raise the wheat, and the ones that ship it, and store it, and sell it, and bake it, are all in the same work with you. If any of them do their work badly — fall down on their jobs in any way — either there isn't so much bread, or it isn't so good, or it doesn't get to the people when they ought to have it. And everybody *has* to have bread!"

Mildred caught her breath. Was he going to say the thing she had been trying to think out for herself — the thing she had been waiting for? She felt the color rise to her cheeks.

"And so that you'll be able to do your share in seeing that everybody, including yourselves, has bread, you've got to learn to work, and I'm here to teach you the best and easiest way. There isn't anything about it that's too hard for any girl to do, but your share has got to be done right every day, not because you will be docked in money if it isn't, but because it will interfere with the bread that all the people of the United States have got to have."

Mildred felt a stirring in the place where her emotions slept and a quick burning back of her eyes. It was like the way you expected to feel in church — and mostly didn't! And her rising enthusiasm for the things John Barton had said reached out to include the man who had said them, and some of the glory she thought she saw in them flashed back again over him.

It was evident that not all of the girls took in the meaning of this little prelude. To those who had personally experienced work as it occurs in the uncontrolled world of industry, John Barton's talk was quite unrelated to reality. But to Mildred it was a new gospel announced by a new prophet.

"And now I'll start you in the sewing room," said the foreman. "Over there you'll find your aprons and caps."

When they were ready he led them to a long, low table, pointed each one to a chair and handed out great coarse needles, and piles of cotton twine. Then he brought a small bag of flour with an open top to the end of the table.

"Now this, girls, is what I expect you to do. You turn in the top like this — see? Hold it tight together with your left hand — be sure there's a knot in the end of your thread, and begin to sew the top up with six

stitches, pulling them tight like this — see? and fasten the end of the thread with two stitches — see? Now if you have all got your needles, each thread hers with a piece of twine. Don't mix up your pile of twine, you fourth girl from the end (this to Ellen Forsythe), — get it all straight before you begin. There now, all right! I'll give you each a bag and you will see how to do it."

It was a pretty poor performance, judged from the standpoint of getting flour sacks sewed in anything like a reasonable time. The girls who had worked in the clothing factories did much better than the Wadleigh High School girls or Ruth or Mildred or Ellen Forsythe. John Barton watched them in silence and walked down the table and told each girl what was the matter with her work.

"Now all get your hands off the table and we'll try it again."

He pressed a lever, and the part of the table where the bags stood tipped, and they slid into a chute beneath while unsewed ones came down from above. The second bags went a little better but it was still slow work. Over and over during their first shift the foreman stood beside them teaching them the simple work of sewing the tops of flour sacks together — over and over again! Each girl had a sandwich and a glass of milk at ten o'clock and then back to their tables and their flour sacks.

So that was the reason why she was there, — Mildred told herself as she struggled with a refractory flour sack, — so that everybody could have bread! The idea didn't excite her much because she had always taken it for granted that they had bread anyway. And besides, her connection with it all, through those six stitches in the tops of the little flour bags, seemed attenuated and remote. And then came the foreman and took the first ten

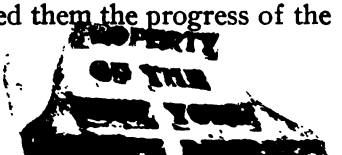
girls on a journey through the mill. Leaning from the top window Mildred saw far down below the full cars pouring their loads into the mill.

" They come from all over the country," said the foreman, leaning out beside her. " No one kind of wheat alone makes the best flour. From as far south as Oklahoma, west to the Rockies and north to the Canadian border the land has been plowed and harrowed and planted, and the farmers have watched the sky, and the Departments in Washington have experimented with ways to get ahead of the weevil and the rust, and the reapers and thrashers have worked, and the train crews have brought it all here so that we can make the best flour."

Mildred turned, her lips a little apart, and looked straight into the foreman's eyes, — eyes large, long lashed and as deeply blue as the horizon edge of the ocean. It seemed to her that they must see not only everything that was before them but also a great deal that John Barton would like to have there even if it wasn't, and that because he saw it so clearly it was brought nearer to being real. Standing beside the wide endless belt that brought an endless stream of wheat grains from the storage elevators, John Barton caught up some kernels.

" See the different kinds." He held his open palm toward the girls. " Those grains are Number One Northern. We don't get much of that. They probably came down from the Red River Valley. And that's Number Two Spring, from Iowa or Missouri or Illinois. And these that are yellow or brown or reddish come from hundreds of miles apart. It takes them all in a fixed proportion to make the best flour, and thousands of men and women in thousands of places to grow them all."

He led them down through floor after floor filled with hurrying machinery and showed them the progress of the



wheat from north and south and east and west as it was ground together, screened and sifted and bolted, passing from one process to another almost without human assistance like a great cosmic process, till it poured itself into barrels and sacks and started out over new routes to the waiting country, and to the seaboard and the ships bound for the five continents and the islands of the sea. Mildred remembered the heavy freighters she had seen swinging slowly out into the Atlantic, and those other boats laboring into Hull and Rotterdam and the gay ports of the Mediterranean; she remembered the little village bakeries in France and Germany and the funny Dutch children munching wheaten bread on their way to school. It might have all come from this very mill! And if anything went wrong here the boats and the bakeries and the children would all have to stop!

She sat down to her sewing again a little awed. It wasn't so small a thing to sew flour sacks as she had thought — why, it was important to everybody in the world to have them sewed right! John Barton had told them that their part in patriotism was to put in those six stitches, drawing them tight and making a knot at the end. It was just like being a soldier or a sailor, he said, only you didn't have to wait for a war to serve your country.

By the end of her first day, Mildred had a curiously hushed feeling about her new place in the universe. She had inadvertently become a part of a very big thing and she wondered if she would be able to do her share. And the mystery and romance of it were so overshadowing, that she found herself compelled to summon the thought of her engagement and the picture of Nick, as a conscious matter of duty instead of having them overwhelm her with joyous irresistibility.

When she marched back to the barracks after the first six hours of work she had ever done in her life, Mildred had a sensation of almost religious upliftedness, as though the sewing up of flour sacks was a great ritual, and the mill a cathedral with John Barton as the officiating priest.

CHAPTER IX

THE members of the Forty-second Unit settled down into their new home like college girls. What they were required to learn was widely different from college work, but their life was not unlike that which the founders of the early women's colleges expected those institutions to give the students. It trained them through actual work and actual experience, and induced a wholesome democracy by the fact that rich or poor, wise or foolish, the same things were expected of them all.

There were certain fixed demands on them, inescapable overhead charges on time and effort, to meet which the rest of their lives had to be regulated. To begin with there was that awful bell that rang at five in the morning and lifted the reluctant girls out of their beds as though they were attached to it by wires; and then came the quick scramble for the white bath tubs and the scurrying into uniforms and the rush down the stairs of those who, being on the second shift at the mill and therefore not on duty till noon, were required to help get breakfast for the others. And after the first shift had marched away, there was the clearing of the dishes and setting of the house in order, and tramping away to the lecture hall at one end of the long rectangle of buildings for the academic part of their training — lectures in good English, in simple accounting, in politics and government — which they shared with all the boys and girls stationed in

Minneapolis, and for a few special lectures in the principles of agriculture.

This lecture hour had an enchantment all its own, for there were the Service boys also, and was it not possible to send soft glances across the room — and get them returned with interest? And was there not also a chance to talk as they left the class room? And to talk meant to make friends, and could not friends come to the big living room in the evening and play games and increase the joy of life generally? So the by-products of the lectures, and incidentally the lectures themselves, were exceedingly well liked.

And after the lectures, the girls marched back to their house again for two free hours. Sometimes these were devoted to exercise, sometimes to mending the clothes which under the assaults of vigorous and lively young women developed such rips and tears as kept Mamie Epstein, wise in the making of garments, in a continual state of complaint.

"Say, the forelady didn't have no license to leave the seams go out not fastened at the ends. If she should be working for the United States, the way our boss is, she wouldn't dast to do it — understand me? Sure you gotta take it out of the machine and pull the thread through to the other side to make it stay good — but all the seams of my skirt, ain't I had to fix them over myself? And every time I wear my coat, a button I got to sew on. If all the time I gotta sew buttons for myself, how can I sew flour sacks for the United States?"

And after the mending came an early [illegible], which didn't seem so early to them as it would if they hadn't breakfasted before six o'clock; and the march to the factory where they took the places of the morning shift as the clock struck twelve. For the machinery of that gov-

ernment mill never stopped day or night, and there were four six-hour shifts of Service boys and girls, and three eight-hour shifts of adult workers.

In the afternoon, the morning shift had their classes and their exercise and their mending and their free time, and then all to the kitchen to help the cook, and stirring and mixing and putting into ovens and taking out again! For dinner in the Service was a meal elaborated into three courses — soup, meat and vegetables, and a dessert,— and this in itself was an adventure to those of the Unit who had been used either to the desultory feeding of the poor, or to the elaborate menus of the rich, and for them all it was a training in what a meal ought to be. After dinner was done they settled down to their short evening.

And all the time they were talking, talking, talking together of the things that made up this great new adventure. As they gathered round the low lamps and looked at the magazines and papers, Annie McGee and Mamie and Ruth and "Winkles," a girl from Syria, and the rest, pooled the varying interests and experiences of their short lives and handed them about, and exchanged them, and thrashed out the things of this world and the next in the light of them. And back of all their talk, and in and through it all, was the consciousness of the great mill, the tangible expression of the work all the people were doing together. Through this material thing John Barton dominated their young minds. Through him, their world grew wide around them, and they began consciously to live in the whole universe.

Mamie Epstein, with the amazing mixture of idealism and narrowness that the New York Ghetto breeds, saw her little world stretch out over all the farms where the "Krists" tilled the land and wore the clothes she had seen being made in New York by the people who ate the bread made from their wheat.

"Almost like relations it makes us, only not so much," she said thoughtfully.

Winkles preened herself at the difference between America and Syria.

"In my country there is always the little mill. My mother, my grandmother, every woman, sits every day to make the flour. Have not I myself turned and turned at the handle? Only sometimes in the village is a mill and men to grind for all who come. But here is there not Mr. John Barton to tell us how to make the flour so that even my grandmother and her daughters need no more to sit at the mill in my country but may eat of the flour of America?"

Ruth Ansel's world precipitated itself out of something like primeval chaos into an ordered series of interlocking operations. She considered thoughtfully the way the mill machinery was arranged so that the wheat could go about on its own responsibility and with only a little supervision here and there turn itself into flour and start out to the people who needed it. She felt that it ought to be possible to make the whole world as automatically perfect as the mill.

Mildred's world began to have fewer things taken for granted in it. The people who made the thread she sewed the bags with, who made the ominously whirling wheels in the engine room, and the bricks in the mill walls, might be eating the flour from this mill. She looked speculatively at the toe of her brown shoe, — flour from somewhere had gone to the man who made it. Her mind followed the various threads in the weft of civilization and found that the warp that held them together was always food, for everybody had to have bread. As she realized how important was the thing she was helping to do, self-respect grew in her, together with a

spirit of responsibility toward her work, and an enormous reverence toward John Barton as the source of this new vision.

All the girls began to feel that life was uncommonly good to them and that this new and wonderful experience could not be spared out of their lives — no, not at the cost of marriage or money or success or leisure or anything of which they had yet dreamed.

There were bright days when they would take their hours out of barracks and their princely earnings of a dollar and a half a week and go to the little shop around the corner from the court house, where slim young waiters brought them delectable imitations of French pasties for ten cents, and ice creams for fifteen cents more, and then if it were crisp and cold as well as sunshiny, chocolate, very hot, with a summer cloud of whipped cream on top. And if it were early in the week, and their pay still intact in their pockets, they would have another pasty, so rich and sweet and so sauced and flavored, that they couldn't tell if it were peach or plum or berry, and certainly didn't care. And into that shop would come other Service girls and boys too, with all the accents of all the world. I wonder if they still come there or if another little shop with quite other little cakes has taken its place! And then if it wasn't too dark and they still felt energetic, they might go for a tramp beside the Mississippi just as the aërial mail drove by overhead. This air service which had come during their lifetime gave them a sort of proprietary joy. The morning mail, winging down from Blue Earth and Fargo and Moose Jaw, was too early for them to see, so they usually watched for this twilight return. Ruth was always trying to make out a cousin of hers who had been a bombing pilot during the war and still drove a battle plane converted to this

service of peace. Mildred wondered if by any chance Arthur Wintermute had worked hard enough to be admitted into the flying corps yet. Winkles and Mamie had no more personal concern in the airplanes than as though they were giant wild geese driving north, diminishing to the size of pigeons, then to swallows and vanishing away as the tiniest of gnats. But for all of them there was the romantic appeal of this hazardous calling and the sense of comradeship, for as Mamie said:

"If we ain't making flour how can they get bread so they can fly — understand me?"

The girls would stop and watch the river and dream quite wonderful and unrelated things, and try to put them into words, and fail utterly. And turning back as the sun got low and the river went black in its bed, still talking on and on of work and play and not a little of men and love and marriage. And Mamie would tell of Max Ulman who was "almost like a gentleman friend, understand me?" and Ellen spoke with elaborate carelessness of an artist who had asked her to "sit to him for the hands" and Annie McGee boasted of a boot and shoe clerk who called her "Peaches and Cream" and was "crazy" about her, but from Mildred, though she was the only one who considered herself engaged to be married, there came not one mention of Nick Van Arsdale. And if it were an emotional, red sunset Ellen would grow sentimental over the river.

"It does exactly what it wants to do — it goes where it likes and nobody makes it."

"When you don't ask it how do you know if it goes where it likes? And, anyway, where does it go?"

Mamie was always inquiring and accurate, and Ruth Ansel's academic training usually helped her to answer.

"St. Paul is the first place and pretty soon it gets to

Red Wing and down where they raise wheat, and on through the corn belt and the rice fields into the Gulf of Mexico."

"Raising things to eat all the way it goes down, do they do it?"

"Everybody eats such a lot they have to. But it isn't only us, it's everybody everywhere. That League of Nations man keeps saying how they need more wheat in Greece or rice in India or something, and everybody keeps growing more all the time."

"Don't you remember how there used to be posters saying how food would win the war and asking us not to waste wheat? Mr. Barton says there won't be much of anything to have wars about now that everybody in the world is eating together."

This philosophy of Mildred's was a somewhat garbled account of what John Barton had said to her during the noon hour.

"You notice the world started its get-together campaign after the great war, on food. It didn't matter so much the things the delegates did or didn't do at the Peace Table. They had shared their wheat loaf with a great part of the world, as the President said, and they weren't going to go back on it — let the lawyers and senators and business men say what they liked. It was more powerful than anything else — food was — to bind them together. So when you're working to make food you're doing a lot more to hold up the League of Nations than the diplomats that are making international laws and the international police force that tries to make people keep them."

These girls walking beside the Mississippi felt the weight of responsibility, but it was a proud burden and they stood straight under it. It made that river bank at

that particular time the most interesting place in the whole world. But they were still young and burdens sat feather light. On afternoons when they still had money in their pockets they were pretty sure to go to a moving picture show, and sit snuggled against each other's shoulders while equestrian heroes rode horses more swift than Lochinvar's. And here they saw news of the day as it really happened, — ships sailing, presidents speaking, bases being run, — and began to philosophize and work out new world policies just as though they knew all about it and nobody had ever done it before! And then out through the door on the sudden memory of barracks and back, running through the streets, just in time to eat the good filling stew and the stomach-expanding vegetable and bread in quantity to deplete the wheat crop, and enough butter to disconcert the most industrious cow — just as though all the sweets and ices of the afternoon were still unserved to them by the slim young waiters!

And if the evening were fine some of the girls would drift over to other barracks where they had made friends, and girls and boys, and sometimes people from outside, would come to see them. Then the games would come out and there would be everything from cards to crambo; or if it were a cool night and everybody specially energetic, the victrola would be started, the tables moved back, and there would be dancing. Once when they began to sing, it was discovered that Ellen Forsythe had a clear little voice of such piercing sweetness as brought the heart to the throat and the tears to the eyes, and that whether she sang the new unrhythmical ballads that were good form in the studios of Greenwich Village, or the old songs that everybody loves because they can hum them, or even the airs from a popular musical show, it

was all the same, for no one could remember, while she sang, anything but the sound of her voice; and the fact that she shirked her work, protested at everything and every one and stood as much like a rock as she could against the submergence of her own rather trying personality in the group, absolutely faded away.

When real winter came to Minneapolis, the little lakes which polka-dot the city froze like thick white china plates and all Scandinavia put steel to its feet and flung out on the ice. Tall, big-boned boys and girls with the pale hair and light eyes of the north had their cheeks whipped to red as they circled and circled and swung. The young Service recruits — such of them as could skate — spent every possible moment on the lakes. There was a sort of freemasonry of the ice which included not only the boys and the girls of the Service but everybody on the pond as well. Mildred, swinging away from Ruth Ansel, found her hand caught by a tall, smiling lad, who, after he had swung her quickly about, asked if he might skate with her. She caught her breath, she wasn't used to such simple social ways — but then everything was different in the Service anyway and why shouldn't she?

"I'll be very glad to skate with you," she answered a little tremulously, but with all the formality she could muster.

He caught her other hand and flew down the pond with long, sure strokes.

"I saw you were in the Service," he explained as though that were an introduction and a claim to consideration all in one.

Another boy called to them:

"Come on and crack the whip."

Quickly they were part of a lengthening line speeding up the ice again. Down toward the middle of the row,

Mildred saw Ruth, laughing like a boy, pulling the whole line forward, and fairly dragging a slender lad who held her left hand, off his feet. The Service uniforms made up only a small part of the line; most of the skaters wore the gay sweaters and flying scarfs and many colored clothes of civilian life. It was not so smart a group as might have skated in Central Park, not perhaps so amusing, but it was far more candidly friendly. The line swung forward at top speed, the other skaters scurrying to the edges of the pond to let them by, and then a group of strong boys at one end checked suddenly, and it wound round and round and round them like a ribbon on a bobbin, and those at the end made the last circle at a terrifying speed and were shot into the central mass with shouts of glee. It was a rough sport and there was a good deal of tumbling about on the ice and screams of laughter. Mildred lost her partner in the confusion and before he found her again they were all up and holding hands and sweeping back down the lake. And so again and again till the Service recruits had to dash back to barracks amid the jeers of those who were younger or older than the draft age.

"Oh don't you wish you could stay!" — "We're going to build a bonfire! — a bonfire! — a bonfire!"

"You don't know what a good time we're going to have."

"We don't have to go until we get good and ready — we don't."

"We'll be back to-morrow," Mildred called gayly, turning and waving to the group still on the ice.

As she started reluctantly on, still keeping longing eyes over her shoulder, she bumped fair and square into John Barton.

"Oh, I'm very sorry," she cried flushing. "I didn't see you."

"I saw you," he said slowly, eying her curiously. "I've been seeing you for quite some time."

"We've had a lot of fun," said Mildred, feeling strangely embarrassed and beginning to walk on.

The foreman was walking beside her.

"You really enjoyed it, did you?"

"Oh, I love to skate. Father taught me when I couldn't much more than walk. I remember yet how I tumbled around on the ice when we went to the country for Christmas. Nick Van Arsdale and I have skated every pond and creek in Greene County."

"Who is Nick Van Arsdale?"

"He's the boy who lives next door."

Never was a literally true and innocent remark more calculated to deceive! Mildred's mind swept suddenly away after Nick's trim figure flying up the river ahead of her. What fun if he had been here today! Nick was part of things like this.

"I wish we didn't have to stop so soon," she said wistfully, looking back.

"But you have to be ready for the mill in the morning — that's the first thing."

Mildred came back with a start.

"Oh, I know."

She was conscious of a faint shadowy resentment as they walked on in silence. But then John Barton began to talk of quite grown up and serious things, and Mildred felt that after all he didn't hold it against her that she had wanted to go on skating, in spite of the fact that she was due at the mill at six the next morning. She resolved to be more worthy of his confidence in the future and by the time they reached the barracks she was again caught up into the heaven of enthusiasm for the work she was helping to do and the man who was directing it.

CHAPTER X

AS the Forty-second Unit began to know itself and understand its own habits and ways, it took it for granted that men and boys always tended to circle around Mildred Carver. It was not because she was more beautiful than the other girls. There was a timid little Italian with the face of a Bouguereau madonna, and a red-haired girl with flaming beauty like a conflagration. It was not because of her wit, for that faded timidly away before Mamie Epstein's sudden sallies. But she had that nameless attraction that is the indefinable, ineradicable difference between a siren and an ordinary woman. It was a dangerous birthright, and Mildred was to get harm and joy of it all her life.

One day in the mill she was slow in letting go of her flour sack as it slid down the chute. There was a cry, a little spurt of blood, and then the machinery was stopped suddenly as she held up a bleeding left hand. John Barton came running, smothered her hand in cotton waste, and half carried her down to the office where it was bandaged. It wasn't a serious hurt. Mildred protested that she could go right back to her work — she *was* back at it the next day. But John Barton was surprisingly concerned. He came and watched her, explaining that if it pained at all she must stop, and at recess he sat down beside her and after a mere perfunctory question about her hand, stayed talking idly till work began. The following day he came again on the same pretense and talked on with no pretense at all, so that the observing

Mamie Epstein remarked to Ellen as they ate their mid-morning sandwiches:

"A crush on Mildred the boss has got all right!"

"That Barton? How do you know?"

"The front of your face instead of the back of it to them, shows you!"

Ellen turned calmly and studied the two.

"Grand wages all right don't you bet he gets?"

"How should I know? I suppose it's on the Civil Service list if you want to look it up."

"Her chance to get married maybe it could be. She should worry about work if he got engaged to her!"

"I don't see how you can be thinking all the time about getting married! It's the last thing I think of. I wouldn't give up my liberty for any man."

"Say, honest — you don't want to get married?"

"Decidedly not!"

"But what'll you do? Ain't you got to work?"

"Do you think I'd give up my *Career* and be a parasite and let a man support me?"

Ruth Ansel joined them, her sandwich in her hand.

"To Ellen I been saying, a crush on Mildred Mr. Barton he has all right."

Ruth swung around and looked at the two as Ellen had done.

"I don't see it."

"Well you can take it from me. I noticed it before. Maybe she'll get engaged to him."

"Oh, no!"

"Grand wages he gets, don't he? In a flour mill there ain't no slack season, is there? You can believe me or not, all the time I bet he works."

"That wouldn't matter."

"Say, I guess you don't know! And it's grand he's the boss too!"

"It isn't a question," said Ellen languidly, "of being the boss or being a mere hireling. It's the idea of his being in this sort of work at all. I couldn't *stand* it. And of living in a new place like Minneapolis that hasn't any atmosphere. Besides, I don't think there's anything in it. She *did* hurt her hand."

Ruth, who had been watching them with the corners of her mouth twitching, grinned wickedly:

"Girls," she announced, "there's no more chance of Mildred Carver's marrying that man than there is of her marrying me."

"Has she got a gentleman friend, already?"

"Not that I know of, and I guess it would get into the papers if she had."

"Such a fool she should not be as to let a grand man, like Mr. Barton is, not marry her!"

They went back to their work, but there was a little furtive eyeing of Mildred who sat pensively picturing a world full of beautiful idealized industry, operated by purely altruistic workers, and supervised by Mr. John Barton, foreman of the mill.

As the newness of the mill work wore off, and the grind and monotony began to appear, when her back ached and her eyes were tired and there was no charm in holding the top of a cotton flour sack together with the left hand while she put in six firm stitches with the right, Mildred found herself turning for consolation not to the gay figure of Nick, which made all this seem doubly dull by contrast, but to the inspiring picture of John Barton, which gave to the thing she had to do all the elements of a great drama.

To Mamie Epstein, John Barton was merely the boss of the mill. He was not different in kind from any foreman in a cloak-making factory on Twenty-eighth

Street. To Ruth Ansel he was a sort of human lubricant which smoothed the operations of the mill. To Ellen Forsythe he was an adverse potentate under whose relentless eye she was compelled to sew flour sacks when her temperament demanded that she go out on the river bank and invite her soul in immaterial solitude. But to Mildred, John Barton was a beneficent contemporary Prometheus, holding in his hand the processes through which the people were fed. If he failed the wheat would have been grown in vain and men and women would go hungry; there would come the disorder and dissension that must arise among hungry people and the small strife that meant suffering and the big strife that meant war. But it was plain to Mildred that he did not fail.

The day Mamie had announced her discovery to Ellen and Ruth, she came and sat on Mildred's bed at night, evidently bent on talk.

"Say, ain't the boss elegant!" she began.

Mildred, who was getting used to Mamie's vocabulary, agreed that he was.

"I bet you like him?"

Mildred agreed to that, too.

"To get acquainted with a man like that, ain't it grand?"

Mildred felt deeply that it was and began to join in Mamie's pæan of praise, and extend it, and widen it out all around, and amplify it with excerpts from the doctrine he had preached to them. And by just the amount that she got beyond Mamie's depth, did Mamie measure Mildred's interest in John Barton so that she felt her surmises confirmed and certainty grew within her as Mildred talked on. She would have been more certain still, if when the lights were out and the whispering had died down, she could have dropped with Mildred over the edge

of sleep and found her going through again a little scene of the day before. The foreman had told Ellen Forsythe that if she didn't make the last two stitches tighter, the flour would leak out at the corner and whoever bought it would get less than they paid for.

"And the people who buy these small bags are usually the ones who can't afford to buy big ones, so it's harder for them to lose it than as if they had more money to spend for what they eat."

Mamie herself had picked up the bag she had just finished and examined both corners with care, but Ellen had lifted her chin and drooped her lids resentfully as though there ought to be flour enough for everybody anyway whether it leaked out at the corners or not, and if there wasn't, it was somebody's fault and a "Movement" ought to be started about it.

John Barton, as the source of all this ethical light, took, in Mildred's dream, some of the characteristics of the Sun God, and as she dropped off to sleep she was dazzled by her vision of him.

Mamie was almost right in her reading of the situation. The long breeding of the Carvers for health and beauty, their training in culture and kindliness, had resulted in a girl as attractive in a mill as in a drawing-room — just as lovable in an apron as in a ball gown. So the Sun God shone with unusual warmth in the days that followed, and Mildred flowered responsively. All sorts of tendrils of appreciation went groping out toward him, and her little unawakened soul was filled with the sight and sound of the foreman of the mill as of a godlike prophet, a bringer of light, a Theseus and Sir Launcelot and Joshua rolled into one. He appealed to the religious enthusiasm which is hid in the heart of every young girl, — the fanaticism that can develop either into hero worship or

passionate self-sacrifice, and can fill convents as easily as cradles. And all the wisdom of all the sages cannot tell it from the love of a maid for a man — until afterward! John Barton was to Mildred the sum of all the wonderful new ideas he talked about, while Nick, who had never talked about anything she didn't know already, was merely a person.

Nick's letters had not told her much of what he was doing, — still less of what he was thinking. If the Service meant anything to him comparable to what John Barton had made it mean to her, they did not show it. Instead, they were full of the sort of things she had cared for before she went into the Service, — about the theater and who was singing and painting pictures and what her friends were doing. Mildred thought sadly that he didn't seem to have any idea what the Service was all about, and tried to hand on some of the inspiration she had acquired by filling her letters with John Barton, — what he said, how he ran the mill, and how wonderful it was when he came to the barracks in the evening. But she wasn't yet able to set down abstractions with her pen and Nick got a vivid sense of John Barton as a personality set in the overwhelming vantage post of foreman, and felt very small indeed by comparison.

As for John Barton, he saw Mildred as a singularly lovely and intelligent young American girl of the sort that New England produces so in excess of the demand that they wither in the parental gardens everywhere, or get shunted into genteel employments which are not much better than this wistful withering; but who in fortunate exceptions, are carried away into some more emotionally succulent field, where life gives them experience and love, and where they bloom into the best that this country or any other can produce. This was the sort of

girl that John Barton thought Mildred was, and he let his good sturdy working-class dreams of an American home and children fix themselves upon her.

CHAPTER XI

MILDRED'S letters to her mother greatly disquieted that lady. She had thought of this daughter of hers as a little female Joseph sold into an urban, Scandinavian, Egypt. Her heart ached at the trials and sufferings, hardships and unpleasantnesses that Mildred would have to undergo. She had expected that the girl's letters would be full of inevitable complaints and was prepared to administer epistolary consolation. But nothing of the sort had been called for! Mildred's work engrossed her; the other girls delighted her; the mill rose, not as a prison house where she toiled unwillingly, but as a sort of religious center from which all sorts of beneficences appeared to emanate. And what was this talk of being responsible for the breakfast rolls of the whole United States? The girl was merely sewing the tops of flour sacks together! And all this about a Mr. Barton who seemed to hold some position in the mill, — a sort of taskmaster under whom the girls performed their forced labor. Mildred seemed to see him outside the mill. Probably some man inclined to presume! Were the girls allowed to run about in the city where men like that could talk to them? She had thought they would be subject to galling restrictions, but it was their extraordinary freedom that alarmed her.

And then one day she saw the old street cleaner on Washington Square marching at the head of a squad of lads in Service uniforms. They carried scrapers and brooms and set to work promptly picking up papers and

putting quite a super-polish on the pavement that Mrs. Carver admitted had not been usual before the Service was established, though she told herself resentfully that men could have been hired to do it just as well if the Board of Estimate had voted the money. Her eyes had followed the gang strung along the block until a voice spoke at her elbow and she turned to look into the face of Nick Van Arsdale.

He was grinning like a naughty boy and Mrs. Carver felt herself quite out of the supply of social tact which was her special asset.

"What — what are you doing here?" she demanded baldly.

The boy continued to grin.

"I registered for road making, you know, and street cleaning seems to be the kindergarten stage of it. They are sending me south pretty soon to work in the red clay soils."

"Oh, Nick — what will your father say!"

"He hasn't said much of anything yet — doesn't seem to have any remarks on hand to fit the situation."

"I shouldn't think he would!"

"He's been down twice to see me do it, though, and he objects to my method. The last time he pointed out a cigar stump I'd missed."

"Oh, my poor boy!"

"Oh, not at all, Mrs. Carver. I'm liking it as far as I've got."

"Nick, I can't believe it! But will you come for dinner tomorrow night? We're having people you know."

The young street cleaner stood with his Service helmet in one hand and his broom in the other.

"They don't let me out of barracks at dinner time.

They see to it personally that I am fed what will make me a good street cleaner — stew mostly! But I'll be through here about four — might I come for tea?"

Waddell, the Carvers' old butler, relieved Nick of his helmet in a state of bristling disapproval. That a butler should be expected to serve a street cleaner! He had known Nick since he was a boy, but if one's social standing is not determined by one's occupation, the foundation of the universe must be toppling. And to have him talk about his work quite openly! Waddell was used enough to gentlemen who did things for their living that he could not socially approve, but he expected them to maintain a graceful reticence on the subject. And here was this young Mr. Van Arsdale boasting of what he was doing!

"No, it isn't hard work — not half so hard as polo," said Nick, taking more sugar. "I get six hours in the street and an hour of setting-up drill — military, you know — and an hour of regular school work every day. — No, I don't mind that part of it at all. What do I mind? — Well, I have to make my bed in the morning. Do you know, it's some trick to make a bed so you can sleep in it afterward? I've had more trouble learning to do that than anything else so far. Oh, I say, Mrs. Carver, is Mildred getting on all right? Her letters are jolly enough, but they're not the way I thought they'd be. Of course I know she hates it only she won't say so."

"I don't think she hates it, Nick. She doesn't write to me as though she did. There's a man named Barton who seems to be talking to her a great deal — keeping her amused and interested."

"She's written to me about him, too. I guess he's the foreman in her mill."

"Just what has she said?"

"Oh, I don't know exactly. It's kind of mixed to me. He seems to be around all the time."

Mrs. Carver covered her anxiety by swinging back to Nick's experiences.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Carver, I have to do other housework, too. I'm learning to wash dishes and wait at table. I wish you'd just write and tell Mildred that. Any little points in favor of my usefulness, you know."

"Why not write her yourself?"

"I have! Do you think I'd let a chance like that slip? But I'd like you to back me up."

Waddell, in a state of theoretic immobility, was nevertheless detected in a sniff and Mrs. Carver looked up at him speculatively. He was an imported English product and she saw that when a street cleaner was not only invited to tea but could take such an attitude toward the daughter of the house, his world must be in process of dislocation. Later, in the spirit of humanity, she spoke to him about the Service.

"Thank you, madam, that Service, if you'll excuse me, madam, ain't no good. There's Wicks, the second footman — you may not have noticed him, madam. He went into the Service in order that he could vote — something to do with cutting trees; or not cutting of 'em it may have been, — and since he come out, he's not taking to the work. He enters into conversations, madam. I caught him advisin' of Mr. Carver's own nephew, friendly like, to go into the forestry, which it was a grand work, madam. And I'm only keeping him on because since the Service was set up, footmen is almost impossible to come by."

Mary Carver had a quick vision of what it would be when footmen were not to be come by at all — nor maids either! But then, no such state of things ever had been

and of course it never would be. Was not Aunt Millicent a comforting proof of permanence? The life to which she was accustomed was founded on the fact that other people did the rough work of the world. Her resentment against a too socialized government grew as she brooded over the matter. So many different sorts of things might happen, most of which she felt justified in objecting to, that she gave way to an impulse, quite out of the family custom, and took the train for Minneapolis without letting Mildred know that she was coming.

Mrs. Carver, minus her maid and with only a porter-borne traveling bag by way of impedimenta, settled herself just as the train started over the same road the troop train had taken. Same tunnels, same palisades beyond the river, same little boats bustling up and down! But the people in this train were not starting on the great adventure of life; they were merely swinging round and round in the eddies where chance had swept them. Two traveling salesmen talked loudly of the commissions they had made and the amount they were able to charge up to expenses. Further down the car was a mother and her faded daughter, obviously middle class. They were knitting steadily, having apparently acquired the habit during the war and being unable to overcome it now. There was an elderly gray man in a clerical collar, who seized the opportunity of travel to enjoy a little nap, a trim husband and wife and a subdued child, a limp business woman doing her accounts — a whole carful of people for whom life had settled into grooves. No "right-about-face" would ever be called to them now. They had no expectation that rainbow possibilities were waiting round the corner. Sober certainties filled most of their world. Mary Carver watched them distastefully.

By contrast to her traveling companions, she found the

girls of the Forty-second Unit comforting. She stood at the door of the sewing room, searching the rows of girls for Mildred and was much heartened to find them far more attractive than she had dared to hope. At last she discovered her daughter at the far end. Her hair was covered with a white cap and she wore a coarse apron from her throat to her ankles. Her eyebrows were full of the white dust, it lay smoothly over her little perky nose and under her blue eyes, and there was quite a deposit of it beneath her under lip.

But if Mrs. Carver could not classify the girls as she stood silently watching them, she herself in her irreproachable broadcloth and furs with just one jewel at her throat, was a person they could approximately pigeonhole at once. It was evident, however, that Mrs. Carver's appearance explained nothing to John Barton who stood silently beside her — that to him ready-made clothes or English-tailored, were all the same; and that jewels might be bought at the ten-cent store for all the difference he could see. Mamie Epstein's startled "Oh Gawd" at last made Mildred look up from her work.

When she saw her mother she jumped up and hugged her in a floury shower, and choked and cried a little, for she was very young and suddenly rather lonesome. The foreman, significantly sympathetic, gave her half an hour off and they went out by the Mississippi.

"Do you know what I am, Mother dear?" Mildred asked mischievously, when she had brushed the flour from her face and the tears from her eyes, "I'm an unskilled laborer — the kind you read about in strikes. And I'm here to 'dilute skilled labor.' That is what Mr. Barton told me. The engineers who run the machines stay right along — Mr. Barton's been here for four years — but they only keep us 'rookies' three months."

"Who is Mr. Barton?" asked Mrs. Carver cannily.

"Why, he's the foreman! He brought you in. He came from Maine and it just fits him like a fiddle."

Mary Carver felt that her daughter must have borrowed that phrase from the man himself.

"And in the barracks, too, Mother," Mildred went on, "we rookies are just one step above the vacuum cleaner and the machine that mixes the bread. It embarrasses me not to be more important, but it kind of uplifts me to be paid a dollar and a half a week for doing work. It's quite different from when father sends me money. Do I have any fun? Why, I have two hours out of barracks twice a week when I can do anything I like!"

And this girl had been used to doing as she liked about nine-tenths of the time!

"Have you seen Nick?" asked Mildred with a little self-reproachful anxiety.

"Oh, yes — did he write you he was cleaning streets?"

"Yes — poor thing — how he must hate it."

"I was surprised to find that he didn't seem to feel that way about it at all."

Mildred looked at her mother pityingly.

"Oh, he wouldn't make a fuss of course, — he'd laugh and be funny, but I know he was just pretending. There's nothing in the world Nicholas Van Arsdale hates like getting dirty and having to do as he's told. And then he doesn't know what it's all *for*."

Mildred spoke with the conviction of superior knowledge, and Mrs. Carver enjoyed her assumption of proprietorship.

"No," said Mildred with thoughtful conviction, "work wouldn't suit Nick at all."

"He asked me to tell you that they're teaching him to peel vegetables and make beds and mend his clothes —

he said he felt you'd be glad to know that he was getting trained in housekeeping so that he'd be useful in the home."

"Oh, did he?"

Mildred was so startlingly noncommittal that Mary Carver stared. Had the girl lost her sense of humor? Had any misunderstanding come between her and Nick? Certainly nothing was further from her intention than to let a mere technical refusal to recognize an engagement, break off so desirable a match! But she spied the thin gold chain on Mildred's neck from which depended the pink pearl ring and comforted herself.

Mrs. Carver came to the barracks that evening after dinner. She wanted to see for herself how her daughter lived and to discover what she could do to mitigate her hard lot. But just as Mildred was beginning to tell her about the details of the Service — all the important little things that a girl of eighteen wouldn't think of putting into a letter — the foreman of the mill sauntered in and with elaborate carelessness joined them in their corner. On being formally presented to Mrs. Carver he assured her that he was glad to make her acquaintance.

The talk between them was simple enough, for Mrs. Carver after arranging several pauses in which he might gracefully have withdrawn, resorted to a rapid fire of direct questions about things she wanted to know, and being a social expert she got a good deal of information that the foreman didn't know he had given her. For Mary Carver had noticed the significant looks passing between the girls as John Barton settled beside Mildred, had surprised on his face a proprietary glance as though he were inspecting a precious possession, and seeing in Mildred's eyes the dazzled gaze of one who looks at the light, she was taken with a horrid fear. This was worse

than the worst she had dreaded, and there was no use pretending security, for such things had happened! She rose suddenly a little breathless.

"I'm sure Mr. Barton will excuse us, my dear. I should like to walk around that courtyard which you wrote me about — the one where you drill."

John Barton rose as though to go with them, but Mrs. Carver held out her hand with an insistently friendly: "Good night, Mr. Barton," and before he could gather himself to meet so much manner, she was vanishing through the door with her daughter.

Mildred was too unconscious of any reason why her mother should wish to separate her from John Barton to know she had done it; but she was distinctly sorry not to share with her mother the wonderful things which the foreman might say at any moment, — the things he was almost certain to say if you waited, — about what the Service meant and why everybody ought to work.

Other girls were walking about in the long galleries that surrounded the courtyard like a medieval cloister. Bits of gossip floated from them to Mary Carver. Strange accents amused and distressed her, and not the least of these was the accent of Mamie Epstein, who came running to them in unembarrassed certainty that she must be welcome wherever she chose to go.

"That your Mamma should come to see you, it's something grand! Say, I wouldn't hate to see my Mamma right away, you bet!" and then as the vision of Frau Epstein, beshawled, bewigged and bent, came in contrast with Mrs. Carver, "Only it ain't like she was like your Mamma — understand me? — so young looking, and beautiful yet! A gentleman friend she could get as easy as nothing a'tall!"

Mrs. Carver felt herself blushing in the moonlight —

a thing out of her experience for many years — and laughing a little nervously, but there was no use being offended with Mamie, her sincere admiration was too evident. And when she bade Mildred good night, she invited Mamie to ride with them the next afternoon, the last she was to be in town, when the girls had two hours of liberty.

Mamie had never been in an automobile before. She held on till her knuckles turned white and conversed in gasps although the chauffeur was an extra cautious Swede. Mrs. Carver took them to a café in a tiny Greek temple beside a little lake. There was an orchestra, and Mamie, though she was quite carried away by the sensuous beauty, could only express her feelings by calling it "swell" and "grand." Mildred cuddled up beside her mother, more like a little girl listening to a fairy story than a citizen in the service of her government or a marriageable young lady beset by an ineligible suitor, and they were all very happy until a bell rang in the distance and both girls jumped.

"Oh, we're late and what will Mr. Barton say!"

"Oh, we gotta be back at six sharp or next week we don't get no time off!"

Mrs. Carver was not greatly disturbed. She was not used to regulations and couldn't see what difference an hour more spent with her — a practiced chaperone, could possibly make to anybody.

"I'm sure it will be quite all right. I shall take pains to explain it to the person in charge," she remarked tranquilly.

"You don't understand, Mother. We're under orders!" insisted Mildred. "No one could explain it but us. We can only stay out if the quartermaster lets us — you see we're working for the United States."

Duty to the nation had been made a direct personal relation for them and the immediate application of it was the need to be back in barracks on time. What could even the most dignified of mothers do but scuttle for the waiting automobile and scramble in while Mildred called to the deliberate chauffeur:

"We've got to be back in twenty minutes. Put on all the speed you've got — or here, let me run her!"

Before he had got his protest ready, Mildred had slid behind the wheel, started the engine and begun a rush that broke every speed law a city ever had. Policemen scurried into the street but she swerved around their extended clubs shouting "Service" as she flew by. Her uniform checked them for just the instant it took her to pass. Mrs. Carver, moved by some instinct of the solidarity of the family that overcame her visible protest, leaned forward and assured the driver that she would pay any fines or damages so long as he didn't interfere. Mamie Epstein, pale and gasping, was so much more frightened at the idea of being late than she was at the way they turned corners on two wheels that she didn't even scream.

It was evident even through her family reserve, that Mary Carver was accumulating feeling to be launched upon her daughter at the end of the run, but they only made it by a hair and the girls rushed into the barracks before she could loose it.

Mrs. Carver went back to New York with a different sort of uneasiness than she had brought with her. Her mind was relieved about the work that Mildred was expected to do. It was distasteful of course, but it couldn't be of any permanent injury to the child; even if it made her a little round shouldered, she would straighten up again. And neither did the girls in the Unit seem a

serious menace — most of them were so very different from Mildred that she wouldn't be affected by them. But the whole life was subversive. The distinctions which people of her class had built up around themselves through the generations and had stood by rigidly, were being disregarded. The bars seemed to have gone down, with the startling result that though other people were not coming into the sacred precincts, their own carefully protected young were rushing out. The limitations of the Service had sunk to unimportance, but its liberations appalled her. John Barton as a personal menace, she was inclined to disregard. Mildred would not be long in Minneapolis and then he would simply fade from her mind. But the state of mind that could place the foreman of a mill as the center of the universe was a terrifying thing. It was not what Mildred did that troubled her, but what she was becoming.

92534B

CHAPTER XII

THE Forty-second Unit of the Eleventh Corps of the National Agricultural Service had a week off with transportation home at Christmas. The dormitory fairly pulsated with excitement during the last few days. Interests that had been submerged by the hurrying rush of the adventure of work shot up to the surface again and there was a drawing back from their common concerns. The old civilization into which all of them had been born rose up and claimed its own. What would they do at Christmas time? What would they eat? What would they put on? Dances in great houses or walks in the ghetto; rides in limousines or on the Fifth Avenue bus; boys who belonged to their pre-service acquaintance pictured just as they had left them, — not changed as they themselves had changed. The mill, great in its overpowering significance, grew unreal.

Mildred on the homeward journey found herself thinking a good deal more about Nick Van Arsdale than she had for the last three months. Of course she had had letters from him, but they didn't say anything about what he was doing in the Service, — only about their lives before they had been drafted, and that to Mildred had grown a little dim. Nick had been set into the background of her thoughts, and when he suddenly emerged, pushing through the crowd at the Grand Central Station, she flushed with embarrassment, for she knew that Mamie Epstein saw him give her the officer's salute with his

slender brown hand; that Ruth's intelligent eyes recognized him; that Annie McGee noticed how his brown khaki arm slipped round her brown khaki waist; and that Ellen Forsythe was not five feet away when he threw Van Arsdale tradition to the winds and kissed her. She tried to make it seem to the girls like a casual meeting, — the merest accident; tried to shift out of the telltale curve of his arm, and get out of the depot before the girls made certain of what they must already suspect. Tucked into the limousine with Wicks and the chauffeur seated in front, she found herself suddenly as shy and trembling as though the pink pearl ring were not still hanging from her neck and Nick her parentally prohibited suitor; as if the evening on the veranda had never been.

"How — how — did you happen to come for me?" she faltered, countering feebly.

"Your mother let me. Of course, I told her I was going to anyway, and she laughed and said I'd better take her motor. Oh, Mildred, — I'm so — "

"When did you get back?"

"Yesterday — I've hardly been away — just down to Virginia to work in the clay soils a little."

"Poor Nick."

"Oh, not at all — I haven't found it bad — and you ought to see me with a shovel — I'm prepared to be your gardener — Mildred — dear — "

But there really isn't any privacy in a limousine making its way down Fifth Avenue in the middle of the morning — stopped by the traffic policemen, crowded up against busses full of staring passengers, taking the wake of vituperative delivery drivers, dodging under the noses of formidable trucks lumbering like land whales with their loads of boxes and surreptitious small boys. Mildred laughed a little at Nick's pretended chafing under

the restraint of being able to do nothing more than hold her hand beneath the dark fur robe, — but she was conscious that she wasn't altogether sorry about it. It might be the latent instinct of coyness that hadn't had time to develop before their sudden passion came upon them; or it might be just a touch of self-consciousness that her first experience of independent living had given her, or perhaps a suspicion of resentment that her old life should try so soon to shut out her new experiences, but anyway she kept in an impersonal world till the car set them down at her door, and there was the sudden scramble of Ruthie and Junior past Waddell standing stately but smiling at the door. There had been no moment with Nick alone, and when she saw him again it was in the midst of other people and overlapping excitements.

For gayeties and pleasures and frolics came crowding on each other's heels, and over them and through them and between them, she and all the young people were talking, talking, talking, about the things they had seen and done and the people they had met; telling those who hadn't yet gone into the Service all about it as though they were college sophomores, instructing their elders and their youngers in a highly superior way, and getting much joy and much credit with themselves in the process.

And what the young of the Carvers and the Van Arsdales and the Wests and the Hopes and the Wintermutes did for their families, Mamie did for the family in Orchard Street, till the prolific circles of the Epsteins and the Berkovitches heard how "grand" this Service was and how you might be sitting on the same seat with Mrs. Astor — understand me? — and never know a thing! And they learned how there was a lot of the United States besides the New York Ghetto into which they had

crowded straight from Ellis Island, and other things to do besides "working by suits," and possibly other reasons for working than just to make a living — but not much of this last doctrine, for John Barton, who had put it into words in Minneapolis, had not been so much of a Sun God to Mamie Epstein as to Mildred Carver. And there was the talking, talking, talking in the circles where Ruth Ansel went, circles in which the theory of the Service was indeed apprehended intellectually but only so far as it concerned material things. And the individualistic temperamental groups of Greenwich Village heard it; and the daughters of Tammany Hall told of the same things in their different way. Conflicts with parental ideas were sharp and flat all along the line — for shall one encourage the young to demolish the order in which one has learned to live even if one does not like it? — to cast reflections on the generation which might have been expected to demolish it for itself? Many startled families took measures to counteract the insidious evil — measures ranging from the strong arm and the upraised voice, to silent prayer. Mrs. Carver, casting about desperately for some defense worthy of her position, hit upon the idea of a dinner dance to which Mildred could ask her Service friends. What if Mildred wasn't out yet — she was eighteen!

Mrs. Carver planned it as the sort of party she had been brought up to — the only kind of party the Carver family countenanced. It would be very beautiful and very stately and very costly. There would be a wonderful dinner, and the most fashionable Hungarian orchestra in a flower-filled ball-room, and afterward there would be a supper served delicately.

Several things at once Mary Carver expected to accomplish, by this dinner dance. She wanted first of all

to show her own daughter by a vivid object lesson just what the life she had been born to really meant, in beauty and delight and the possibility of self-gratification, as compared with the life in the Service of which she seemed transiently enamored; and second, to show her how very ill this heterogeneous mass of Service acquaintances fitted into the circle of the Carvers — who, after all, had discovered the one perfect way of living. Mrs. Carver's inner consciousness was wickedly and comfortably aware that that sort of entertainment, rigidly persisted in, was not likely to show the majority of the Service girls — and she remembered Mamie Epstein poignantly — in the most attractive light.

Waddell, standing importantly at the drawing room door on the evening of the dance was greeted confidently as "Mr. Carver" by Mamie Epstein in a green gauze costume purchased entire out of a Grand Street window. The memory of Mrs. Carver's clothes in Minneapolis had induced certainty as to the financial position of the family, and didn't Miss Epstein know, from the Sunday papers, that a dinner dance among the millionaires called for a low necked, short sleeved gown? So Mamie appeared with a coiffure studied from a hair dresser's window and practiced on for two days, a rather too high complexion, and a calm conviction that her appearance was all that could be expected of any one. Perfect and serene, she entered the door, followed by a young man in an obviously hired dress suit, whom she presented to Waddell with much impressiveness as "my gentleman friend." The butler was only revived by the sight of Alice West and Sylvia Hope coming up the stairs in simple pre-debutante gowns. It was with plaintive gratitude that he escorted Arthur Wintermute to where Wicks waited to take his coat. Waddell could catalogue a

Wintermute or a West or a Hope, but Epsteins and McGees and Cappilarris, like the Smiths and Joneses, were beyond his experience. He suffered acutely throughout the evening. Think of his having to announce at the drawing-room door the name of Mamie Epstein's gentleman friend after he had seen him shaking hands with Wicks as a comrade in the forestry service! Except for the torturing knowledge that such an experience might now be expected in any American home, Waddell would have given notice on the spot.

At Mildred standing by her mother's side in the drawing-room, Mamie gave a gasp of disappointment, for she was dressed in the simplest of white dresses and with no more coiffure than the twisting of her blond hair into a knot at the back of her neck. Mrs. Carver, however, was more satisfying. Here was such a gown as the papers described as a "dinner dress," here was satin, here were shoulders and a string of what Mamie hoped feverishly were "real pearls" because she wanted to be sure that she had seen such things.

The dinner started as Mrs. Carver hoped it would. Out of uniform the differences between the young people were disconcertingly evident. Looking around her great dinner table, she was filled with self-congratulation. Mildred was too young to be counted on conversationally. Her husband would be courteously attentive but not necessarily exciting to the girls on either side of him. David and Winthrop, whom she had especially enlisted, were bred in the limitations of the Carver ideals. Annie McGee in a "one-piece" dress of navy silk with a large lace collar was not easy in the partnership of Arthur Wintermute, dark, slender and faultlessly clothed, with the kindest of hearts, the most democratic of intentions, but no conversational ability to make them evident. El-

len Forsythe in a dull red garment cut on the lines of a garden smock and with what looked like a band of petrified entomological specimens around her head, was obviously disconcerting to Nick Van Arsdale. Winthrop Carver, older and socially experienced, was evidently enjoying the companionship of Mamie Epstein. Mildred had elected to sit by the "gentleman friend," whose name proved to be Ulman, as probably the most difficult social problem in the group. Mary Carver felt that things were starting as badly as she hoped.

Waddell, circling the table at the head of his viand-bearing corps, was conscious that some of the guests did not wait until he presented the dishes at their left before helping themselves. Others suffered from an embarrassment so acute as to prevent their taking any food at all. Constraint apparently emanated from every fork and spoon, and though at first it merely paralyzed their feeding muscles, it quickly rose and tied their tongues. To Mary Carver the situation seemed an interesting vindication of her theory.

And then Mildred leaned forward and spoke to Mamie Epstein down the table.

"Do you think this bread is made of our flour?" she asked.

Mrs. Carver was conscious of a reluctant and exasperated admiration of her daughter. She hadn't reckoned on the child's changing so much in three months. There couldn't have been a more tactful remark — more loosening to the ducts of speech. She might have had twenty years of experience as a hostess! For here was a subject on which all of them stood on absolute equality — on which they need have no reticences or concealments.

The "gentleman friend" swung round in his chair and concentrated an elaborately courteous manner on

Mildred — a manner which gradually changed as he saw her not as the "Miss Million-bucks" of the cartoonists, but as a young girl with lovely direct eyes and a simplicity he had never supposed an attribute of the "swells." Suddenly Mr. Ulman became an Othello, anxious to do something that would please and get attention, and with his experience in the forestry service as the only possible field of narration — for his position in the bookkeeping department of the City Gas Company didn't present any elements of romantic interest — he began to tell Mildred about finding a deserted cabin in the woods.

"And say, the things that were living there you wouldn't believe it! There was squirrels, of course, and a hole where a woodchuck came in — and there was a wild-cat and kittens. Say, Jim, how many kittens did that wild-cat have?"

The question was put to Wicks, busily engaged in passing a conserve on the opposite side of the table. The embarrassed footman reddened and pretended not to hear, then as the question was repeated, he straightened up and out of the servant class, and as Waddell stood petrified with horror, answered clearly:

"Three at first; one got away."

David, hurrying to the rescue of the beleaguered footman, asked what became of the kittens.

"I believe they were sent to the Bronx, sir. There's two up there that come from that way."

And Ruth Ansel with a sudden tolerance which the intellectual aristocracy does not always exhibit, said that they must be the ones she had seen there last summer; and Alice West wished she had seen them; and Arthur Wintermute said he would go and see them, and under the protection of a general buzz of interest in those wild-cat kittens, Wicks went on passing the conserve, Waddell

resumed mobility, and the trying incident was snowed under.

But it had raised in the mind of Mary Carver fresh and more disconcerting possibilities of companionship for her daughter. Not that Wicks wasn't an exceptional young man of upright character and an efficient footman; and a cat may look at a king — yes, but not at a princess!

Mamie's eyes kept circling the table ceaselessly — the people, the flowers, the dishes, the silver, the relays of delicate, unaccustomed foods, nothing escaped her at the same time that she held up her end of the conversation with Winthrop Carver.

"Say, who's that swell gentleman sitting next to Annie McGee? Like a fish in the face he looks."

"His name is Wintermute — Arthur Wintermute."

"My Gawd! To a English Lord is it his sister got married, last year that all the papers had it about her trousseau?"

"Yes, Edith married Lord Percy Elton. They're visiting here now."

Mamie studied Arthur minutely.

"Her picture, I seen in the paper. She don't look like him. Even if her father wasn't a millionaire, I guess she could get married."

"I guess most girls could," laughed Winthrop.

"Well, it ain't so easy if you live on the East Side. And you gotta be awful good looking if you want to get an uptown feller."

"Do most girls want to marry uptown men?"

"On the East Side I guess you ain't never been, to think they wouldn't! Maybe you think it ain't so bad. But I'm part of it — I'm in the show, and I'm going to get out of it. Before I was in the Service I thought I'd

have to try and get me an uptown feller like some of the girls had done. But you gotta get a millionaire or it don't do you no good. You can't get away with no refinement that's as good as the genuine, if you don't marry a real swell."

"And is that what you're planning to do?"

The girl's frank scorn tore the mask from Winthrop's ridicule.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Epstein," he said quickly.

"You can believe me or not, I ain't thinking about that like I did! Being in the Service I seen lots of ways I don't have to work by shirtwaists and live on the East Side. And I got all the rest of the year when I work for the United States like everybody else does. Why, Mildred Carver ain't got nothing on me that way, has she?"

"None of us have anything on anybody while we're in the Service."

"But you wasn't in it, was you? You look too old."

"I was in the army through the war. That's working for the United States, too."

"Would you of done it if it hadn't been the war?"

"Miss Epstein, I don't know. I'm afraid not. You see, there wasn't any way for me to find out about it beforehand as there is for you."

And he tried to tell her a little of what the army service had meant to him.

Ellen Forsythe, further down the table, felt that she must somehow overcome the disadvantages that were descending upon her in this unsympathetic, bourgeois environment. The resentment with which she had entered the Service had not all vanished and she wanted to get back to spheres of influence where she felt more at home, so she turned to Nick Van Arsdale and with a slight clinking of the entomological specimens, inquired casually:

"Do you deep breathe?"

Nick jumped. He had been talking round the curve of the table with Ruth Ansel's brother on whose hockey team he had played.

"I beg your pardon?" he said blankly.

"Do you deep breathe?"

Nick's mind was full of athletics and he took this to be a new phrase on the same subject.

"Not very, but I think I shall get my chest expansion up before the end of the year."

"Oh," cried Ellen. "It isn't that! It's to get inspiration and concentration! It's psychology — really."

Nick's eyes began to dance. The girl was evidently a freak and such a chance — and then he caught Mildred's look, and collapsing under its entreaty answered Ellen with a beautiful consideration that made her feel a little goddess of wisdom and fount of inspiration. None of her brother's artist friends, nor the maned writers she had met in the basement cafés, nor the professional Bohemians of Greenwich Village, nor the high school boys of her home town in Ohio, had ever roused such a feeling of self-appreciation in her. And she was made content again with the Egyptological costume of which she had begun to develop doubts, and her content reflected back to Nick again, to his slender brown hands and his shining brown hair, and his clear brown eyes, and he seemed to her to radiate light as though an incandescent soul were shining through, and for Ellen Forsythe Nick became one with the Sun God. For there are constellations many, and Sun Gods many, to furnish forth the world!

Little whiffs of music had been drifting in to them during dinner and when these were followed to their source, there was the ballroom gay with flowers and Christmas greens. The music swelled as they came in, and Nick swinging Ellen out upon the floor found her dancing with

a grace and abandon that made him forget the smock-like gown, and rise above the distractions of her head dress, only hoping desperately that a large, blue, beetle-like object opposite his left eye, was really dead. Mamie had been disconcerted by the fact that her gentleman friend had not been seated next her at dinner and she was further confused by the fact that he clutched Mildred in an almost frantic embrace and bore her into the dance. This was not the accepted conduct east of the Bowery. But on Winthrop Carver's asking her quite formally if he could have the pleasure of dancing with her, she was comforted. And if this "real swell" did not hold her so close, nor swing her so fast, nor talk to her so much as one of the East Side boys would have done, she still got a great and tremulous pleasure out of it. David was dancing with Ruth Ansel — trying to rather, because Ruth was built rather for utility than grace or pliability, and their efforts resembled a wrestling match.

"Oh, poor David!" cried Mary Carver to Aunt Millicent who had dropped in to watch. "She is walking all over both his feet at once. What an awful time her mother will have making her 'go' after she's out!"

Aunt Millicent considered Ruth drastically.

"My dear Mary, that girl is out now as much as she will ever be. She's not the sort that goes to anything but dances at clubs or hotels or things like that. Except for meeting Mildred in the Service she couldn't possibly have been here."

Mrs. Carver's spirits were reviving. The accomplishment of dancing was evidently too full of the pitfalls of different methods to be socially smooth. This ought to make plain to Mildred what she felt the dinner itself had failed to do — what she herself had not had the courage to put into words.

"Well, I think she's having a good time now."

Aunt Millicent turned at the tone and found her serenely smiling.

"So that's it! I suppose one may be catty in a good cause."

Andrew Carver on his way to a later engagement appeared at the ballroom door with Apperson Forbes beside him. Mildred ran across to her great-uncle — a lovely Artemis in a cloud of white — and quite casually smiled at Apperson Forbes, such a sweet, frank smile, and was so overwhelmingly lovely as she did it, that looking into her eyes which were almost on a level with his, he felt a cold prickling in his long stiff spine.

Old Andrew's eyes twinkled as they traveled round the room. No pleasing eccentricity of costume or pretense of elegance escaped him. Even so mild an adventure was a delight.

"I'm afraid these young people don't fit their steps very well," he chuckled to Aunt Millicent, "but what's that they're doing now?"

David's voice came across the room.

"A batch of Hungarians that we had in a concentration camp did it like that — it isn't the Czardas exactly — more rudimentary and lots more fun. I got them to teach me — most of the company learned. The advantage is that you can do it without any other music than a drum."

The young people formed about him as he stamped and glided and kicked across the floor. And then Ruth Ansel tried to follow and almost fell over her own feet, and Mildred set her hands on her hips and began, and Arthur Wintermute and Nick; and finally Ellen Forsythe slid out upon the floor and the steps and the stamps and the glides and the strange five-four time seemed things she had

been born to, and the red smock floated out and the beads and the trophies clanked, and she was a new dancer dancing a new dance and quite surprisingly lovely as she did it. And they all tried it again and again and the orchestra leader who had a soul above the one-step, tucked his violin under his chin and evolved out of his inner consciousness a melody in the elusive rhythm — or perhaps he had brought it from some Hungarian village, — and came out from behind his screen of palms, a lambent-eyed figure who kept the time with a tapping heel.

It was, he told them, a dance of the peasants in the little villages of the Carpathians. A dance around the fire in the evening, and danced together by the master and the servant, and even by the lord from the castle, sometimes when he was a boy. And they all stamped and glided and snapped their fingers in the air as they spun around. Mamie Epstein's fat little legs and Ruth Ansel's long shambling ones, the gentleman friend's rented coat tails cutting up the same capers in the air as Nick Van Arsdale's superlative clothes. And then the leader of the orchestra — he seemed hardly to touch the violin to make the music come — cried exultantly:

"See it is the morning of the day and the hunters leave their sweethearts for the chase — see all!" and he caught Mildred round the waist and swung her swiftly in farewell.

"See all!"

And Nick caught the girl nearest him, and David valiantly swung Ruth Ansel, and the room was filled with whirling skirts.

"Now," cried the violinist, "it is the music of the hunt," and he began a smooth, racing melody which the rest of his orchestra, stepping out from behind the palms, carried on as he led the men round in the swift rush of

the syncopated five-four gliding, stamping, step, while the girls pressed back against the wall. He changed the rhythm and the men stopped, panting. Now, he told them, it was the village at the close of the day, and there came the song of the mothers to their babies and then way off in the distance the return of the hunters. The young men stirred again without waiting for the leader as the rhythm grew faster. Nick started it and the others followed, and as they passed Wicks, stationed immovable beside Waddell at the door, he too swung forward with the intoxication of it all, till the butler caught him by the arm.

Old Andrew's dapper little feet stirred in his perfect pumps, his old blood quickened in his veins; he too was a young man again in his heart — almost in his body — and past joys rose in him.

The bonds family tradition had set on him were loosed here at their very source — the freedom which he had evaded the family to enjoy, was here at the fountain head. Looking back, Old Andrew thought himself none the worse for his catholic enjoyments, so why should other people be the worse for them?

Apperson Forbes, too, was touched with the intoxication but his feet stiffened in his boots, his fingers threaded themselves stiffly in resistance. In the ordered universe which he understood, emotions and freedoms were expected to stay rigidly in the pigeon homes where they belonged.

The hunting song swelled higher and the returning hunters whirled their sweethearts to the quickening beat of the music and then on round and round and round the imaginary fire in the imaginary village in the imaginary hills, till the very Carpathians seemed to rise and shelter them and the streams came tumbling over the rocks; till

every long corseted impulse of these children of princes and peasants were loosed, and each boy's arm was round the waist of his real sweetheart, and each girl's hand in that of her real lover as the wild music with its unfettered rhythm carried them on and on. And then from the freedom of the edge of the world, the subtly changed beat of the music brought them into the age-old Teutonic waltz — the same soothing swing that the northern hordes carried into Spain and over into Egypt and left as a precious gift to their Scandinavian neighbors and their Celtic subjects, and the key rose from maddening minor cadences up to the serene major, and the wild melody was tamed, and chained, and faltered and died away, — and they were all back in Mrs. Carver's ballroom again with a still orchestra sitting behind palms!

Mary Carver bade her guests good-night wearily. As an example of how impossible it was to mix young people of divergent traditions into a smooth social paste; of how much better the Carvers' way of life was than any other way; of how the democratic ideals of the Service were socially inapplicable, the dinner dance had failed.

And to crown it all, the next morning as Mildred was leaving to go back to Minneapolis, she loosed the slender chain from her neck on which hung the pink pearl ring.

"Mother," she said, "will you take care of this, please? It's really in the way."

CHAPTER XIII

BEFORE the Minnesota winter had loosened its grip, a fresh band of recruits from the Pacific Coast came to take the places of the Forty-second Unit and Mildred and her friends were sent to the field work. They said good-by to the flour mill with considerable regret. It had been their introductory paragraph in the book of work and they had an affection for it. The hurrying belts and wheels, the clanking, roaring machines, the flying white dust were all unlovely enough, but the big thing that they represented, the girls had found good.

John Barton saw them off at the train, an action so unusual that Quartermaster Alice Farrington, who had taken successive relays of Service girls away from the mill, leaned from the car window to watch him speculatively.

Straight down the Mississippi Valley they went, out of the region of tall Scandinavians, down through the farms taken up by the "homesteaders" from New England searching for land with a smaller percentage of raw rock and a longer "growing season," on through the thrifty German settlements along the great waterways, through the farms of the "poor white" invasion from the hills of Kentucky and Tennessee — to an old army cantonment on the edge of Oklahoma which had been transformed into an Agricultural Training Camp.

Here, before the frost was out of the ground, they

were given their first lessons in the care and handling of farm machinery.

Ruth Ansel standing before a bench in the repair shed and carefully wiping with cotton waste the links of a chain to be refitted over the sprocket wheel of a tractor, looked up suddenly to see Ellen Forsythe drop the oil can she was trying to fill and press two small, greasy hands over brimming eyes.

"What's the matter?" she cried, striding around to the other side of the work bench and putting a strong arm across Ellen's shaking shoulders.

"I can't get the oil in — it won't go — the hole is too little — I've spilled it over everything — I — I — just *can't.*"

"Oh, bosh!"

Ruth caught up the can and unscrewed the top.

"Here, take it apart like this — no, turn it the other way, a screw doesn't turn like that! Here — hold it in your right hand and turn it so! — There — now use that funnel. What's a funnel? Why that thing there like a Victrola horn — little end in here — that's it. Now I'll hold it and you pour the oil. Not so fast! Oh, Ellen, you've run it all over the top! Well, take it over to the engineer and I'll sop it up. — But what's the use of being such a dub — you don't think what you're doing!"

"I don't *want* to think about things like this!" said Ellen resentfully as she carried the oil can over to where a tractor with its attendant plows was being overhauled under the supervision of the engineer.

Mildred, in overalls, was polishing the brass fittings, her cheeks pink and her lips a little apart with the excitement. Mamie was kneeling on the floor, her quick hands moving about the cylinders — one girl was struggling

with a wrench — another with some lubricating graphite. At the flour mill they had sat sedately on proper seats and used that traditionally feminine tool, the needle, encountering no worse dirt than flour — now they were expected to work with wrenches and pliers, with oil cans and lubricants — to do ill-smelling jobs with black, greasy rags and polishes and cleaners and disconcerting compounds. They blacked their hands and jagged their finger nails and acquired the compulsory working class habit of wiping their hands on their nether garments and rubbing their noses with their wrists — for shall one smear a real complexion with lubricating graphite? They were no longer fine upstanding human beings — they became turners and twisters under wheels and about boilers; headlong divers into the midst of tangles of machinery; grovellers under car bodies. It was as though they had gone scampering back along the path of evolution, through the quadrupedal stage to the age of worms.

After the " washing up " the first night, Ellen Forsythe threw herself into a chair and began to cry. She was a humorous little figure much too slender for the overalls that had been dealt out to her; with her bobbed hair falling forward over her ears, and her narrow shoulders shaking as she sobbed.

" Look! " she cried tragically, taking her hands from her face and holding them out, " Just look! "

They were small hands — small and weak. Each finger was smooth and round and delicately pointed, the palms sloped away quite suddenly toward the wrists — lovely clinging hands, but not much good to work with. They had stood her fairly well in the mill, but now as she held them out trembling, the narrow nails were black and broken, they were bruised and scratched and blisters were beginning to rise. Ellen, looking at them, began to sob afresh.

"Well, what of it?" inquired Ruth with a disconcerting young sternness.

"Is it that they hurt you?" inquired Mamie Epstein sympathetically. "Say, I guess if you was to tell the doctor —"

"Oh, *no* — I don't mind that! I could stand pain — it's *ennobling* — but *look* at them, they'll never be right again, *never, never!*" and she pressed them over her streaming eyes.

"But, Ellen," Mildred began argumentatively, "You don't need to get them as bad as that. I only broke one nail — that was cleaning the chain."

"Maybe you didn't, but I can't help it — everything hits me — and things drop on me, and the wheels turn when I don't think they will! And everything!"

"But Ellen — you mustn't let them — you must watch!"

"I *can't* watch things like that — I don't *care* about them; they don't *interest* me — Oh, I *hate* it all!"

The quartermaster seeing some trouble came and patted Ellen on the shoulder and put lotion on the bruises and court plaster on the scratches and generally did what she could, but the girl was disconsolate. And when she was given a lesson in running the tractor she fared even worse — levers and gears and speeds were nothing to her — she couldn't focus her mind on them. She did everything unfortunate except fall off. It was a nightmare week to her. Her helpless hands were the fit expression of her helpless mind so far as all machinery was concerned. The instructors instructed and the girls plead in vain and so Ellen was transferred from the Agricultural camp and sent as assistant to the postmaster of Central City, Iowa.

Mamie herself was not having an easy time. She tried

conscientiously, but the actual running of the tractor was beyond her.

"It's like this — see? — on the lever you push to make it go, I gotta get my foot, and I gotta stand up to do it— see? I dassent sit on the seat only when I want to stop, and then I don't have to sit there — see?"

But if Mamie couldn't run the tractor in any way that seemed to further the food production of the nation; the environment she had grown up in had made her a wonderful cleaner of machinery. When Mamie had cleaned a tractor, you could know that it *was* clean — that its tanks and oil cups were full and that it was ready to go into the fields the next morning. Hadn't she known what it was to keep a power-driven sewing machine with all its attachments up to the mark? Yes, Miss Mamie Epstein made herself a valuable agriculturist although she was hampered by all sorts of scientific ignorances. What made a steam engine go she had no more idea of than the mother of Robert Fulton. What made gasoline do anything beyond cleaning gloves she had never even considered. Mildred and Ruth already knew how to run automobiles and had no trouble learning to run tractors.

A week in the Agricultural Training Camp, and they were all sent to a great Oklahoma ranch. There were sixteen girls in the agricultural unit of fifty workers — sixteen girls, twenty boys and fourteen professional farm laborers, men who had been through the training as recruits and had chosen to go on in this part of the government service.

They got to their barracks early in the day, and looked out over a great rolling prairie not yet wakened to the faintest film of spring green.

"If you was to ask me, I'd say there was no place for so much of anything to come from!" cried Mamie.

"God is supposed to have made it," said Mildred, laughing.

She was a little shocked at her own daring in speaking of God — a merely formal church acquaintance — so casually.

"If Ellen were here, she'd object to the mere theory of His being concerned in it," commented Ruth.

"Well, my Mamma says it's ignorant not to believe things like that. You can prove it by that, nobody told you nothing."

The girls fell silent. Speculations about religion were still for all of them things to be entertained furtively, knocking wood the while, lest some offended deity stand ready to punish the unspoken thought.

"Whadda you think we are going to do to it?" inquired Mamie, waving inclusive hands at everything in sight.

"Plow it, I suppose," answered Ruth slowly. "Don't you remember what the man who lectured to us in Minneapolis said about subsoiling and fertilizing and harrowing and seed beds?"

"Oh, Gawd!" said Mamie, awestruck. "Have I gotta do all that!"

Mildred remembered suddenly that Nick must be somewhere in this part of the world — he had written that they were putting him on the real roadmaking at last and sending him to the Southwest. It came over her how little she had seen of Nick during her vacation; there hadn't been an hour they had had alone. She didn't know much of what he had been doing and nothing at all of how he felt about it, but she thought she knew.

Poor Nick! He didn't see this great business of working for the United States as she did — he couldn't! Nobody like John Barton had ever explained it to *him*. It was going to be pretty hard to make him understand how

she saw it even after they got back and were married. The prospect appalled her.

The next morning an automobile bus carried them to the field where the tractors waited for them to begin work. It is one thing to run a tractor round and round the practice field in the cantonment, and quite another to start off over the prairies on one's own responsibility with the great rumbling machine.

Mildred found herself on the second tractor in her field, following the trained driver; and followed in turn by a boy named Wilcox from San Francisco, who had joined them from another training camp. She was so excited that her hands shook and she wondered if she could ever remember which levers did which things and how to work them. And as she settled into her seat and got her knickerbockered legs free for their work on the levers, she had a sudden heartsinking at the thought of the first corner and how she was going to turn it square and trim, just at the moment when the leader turned it ahead of her. She didn't have time to be afraid — almost automatically she started her motor, threw in the clutch and the tractor began to crawl ahead. She said over to herself part of a letter she had had from John Barton that day.

"The field work isn't any harder than sewing flour sacks — when you get used to it. It's all part of the big drive to get the people fed — the most important thing in the world!" That's what she was going to do — "The most important thing in the world!"

Mildred had never been so excited in her life — not when the canoe capsized with her, not when she was allowed to come in for a moment before dinner and be presented to the President of the United States, not when Nick first kissed her in the moonlight! That her tractor

should follow the car ahead evenly and at the proper distance seemed " the most important thing in the world." Her lips were parted for her hurrying breath, her hands held the wheel so tight that they hurt her; she was shaken by an inward trembling.

Her machine seemed to yaw and gee like a sail boat but she kept it following after — sometimes she saw that it overlapped the trail of the leader and replowed the land — sometimes it swung to the left and there was an untouched strip! The wheel seemed a living thing, utterly perverse; the tractor was a great pachyderm running wild. Miles and miles across the prairie she thought they must have gone, before the leader looked back and gave the signal to turn the corner. Mildred felt the sweat start on her forehead as she brought the machine about and slowed down to avoid fouling the plowshares. Never before had life given to Mildred Carver such an intoxicant as came from the first glance she dared to take over her shoulder that showed her six plowshares safely following her down the second side of the field. Her first furrows were indeed twisted and uneven, but they were there. She, Mildred Carver, was plowing the land!

That first three hours of farm work didn't seem real to Mildred — they were too full of sensation and effort to be of this world. There were the long stretches from corner to corner that she tried to make straight — the turns when to bit her machine into obedience seemed like swaying the universe. Not every time did she get round the square without fouling the plows, and when she didn't — there was the stopping of all three machines and the pulling and the hauling and the general righting before they could start again on the gradually shortening sides of the great field; and finally the ending up with what

seemed like a swirl of the head tractor in the center. Mildred hadn't had a thought all the time except to keep her tractor going — what levers she was to pull next, whether she had better swerve around that little hollow or go through it, just how long she must hold up her machine at the corner to let the leader get the proper distance ahead. She was too absorbed to notice the ache in her muscles, the blisters rising on her hands and her growing hunger till the leader called across that it was time to eat.

And there was lunch coming out of a hamper as they reached the farm house — not a little lady-like lunch such as an elegant young female might permit herself to taste in the middle of the forenoon, but good filling sandwiches thickly spread with butter and meat, and hot cocoa and hard boiled eggs and jam — everything that naturally belongs with a picnic except the pie!

Mildred, looking for a place to wash, discovered the pump, and an obliging young girl of fourteen ran out from the farm house to work it for her and bring a tin basin.

"Where do you hail from?" drawled the child softly.

"I beg your pardon?" queried Mildred, a little bewildered, and then suddenly comprehending:

"Oh, yes! Why, I live in New York City."

The girl's mouth and eyes opened wide together.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

"Like what?"

"Livin' way off there like that?"

Mildred laughed.

"It isn't way off when you're there — it's quite near by."

The child watched her soberly.

"My pap came down from Kansas when they opened up the State."

Evidently this was a claim to consideration and Mildred met it with courtesy though quite uncomprehending.

"He came when they opened up the State" — she repeated insistently. "We got a good farm here. We're makin' out good."

"That's nice," Mildred repeated vaguely, she didn't quite sense the meaning underneath the new phrases.

"Do you like it — in New York City?"

"Why, yes — of course I like it — it's my home."

"Do you think I could get to go to the City, when it's my service year?"

"I don't see why not — you just have to ask for it, I guess."

"I never was to a city."

Mildred turned and looked at her carefully — a reddish, blond young thing as most of our native Americans still are, showing the Anglo-Saxon, Dutch, Scandinavian derivations — about the age of Ruth. Never seen a city! — that must mean other strange things, too. She wore a neat print dress of the cheap ready-made sort that the New York factories turn out by the thousands between seasons and that have almost everywhere superseded the traditional homemade calico wrapper, greatly to the advantage of the æsthetics. How would she like the city? What would it do to her? Mildred was unconsciously just on the verge of incipient sociological speculation when the tractor driver called her and she went back for her second three hours on the machine.

She was still too excited to be really tired when her six hour work day was up and the big bus brought the second shift of workers, and gathered her up and took her back to barracks — for though the service recruits had short hours under careful supervision, the machines never rested while there was daylight to run them. For the

earth persisted in swinging on round the sun whether the farmers were ready for it or not — and never since the terrible lesson of the war with Germany had the government of the United States left the putting in of the crops to chance, or individual initiative, or withheld help, or labor, or subsidy, when these would help to the full feeding of the nation.

As the girls got used to their work, they had time to see something of the people whose fields they tilled.

" Not more than a hundred people since they were born have they seen! And land not covered up by cities, only in a park, I never seen till I was in the Service. There ain't nobody they gotta keep up with. Not since they was born did they ever have to do quick anything — and I ain't never had time to do anything slow. Different altogether it makes us! "

The sixteen girls were lingering over their dinner when Mamie launched her philosophy toward the quartermaster, Alice Farrington, who traveled with them as they zigzagged rapidly north into Missouri to keep ahead of the spring.

A black-browed girl down the table showed a gleaming row of teeth and a flash of eyes like great black topaz with brown lights in them — she was from some unpronounceable province on the hither edge of Syria and had a name commonly translated " Winkles " by the girls. Her accent is not to be set down by the twenty-six letters of our alphabet.

" It was like this in my home," she said, " only we were always afraid."

" Afraid of what? " asked the quartermaster.

" Of the soldiers sometimes — they came and took what they chose; or of the wild dogs and wolves that came down from the hills; or of the sickness every year, it

came and if you had it you would die; or of the evil spirits that killed the crops by keeping the rain away."

The girls looked at Winkles in awe. This girl from another civilization than theirs never seemed real — she breathed a combination of the Old Testament and the Arabian Nights. Things that they had only read of had been part of her experience.

"Then how was it like this?" asked the literal Ruth Ansel.

"In my country there were not many people — except in the villages and there only a few. And there were the same things to grow — wheat and barley and corn. And the water was from the well or the spring and not in the house, — just as it is here. Only no man had much land, and they do not have machines like these we run to make it grow much corn, and they are poor and very, very dirty and they die soon — in my country."

There was an awed silence round the table.

"Was that why your father came away?" asked Mildred gently.

The girl's teeth and eyes flashed back at her as though a light had been turned quickly on and off.

"Yes — to get away from being afraid and poor and dirty and sick — in America you do not have to have these things. My father is now an American citizen and I am a soldier for the government."

Mildred felt a lump rise in her throat, the very same lump that came when John Barton had first talked to them in the flour mill. Those emotions which had been bred down below the surface in her race showed a tendency to well up again when she was deeply stirred by something fine and big.

Winkles was becoming one of the best tractor drivers — not because she had any previous knowledge of any

sort of machinery, but because she had great physical endurance, a willingness to submit to direction and an insistence on learning that was not equaled by any other girl in the Unit. It was her first chance to become a part of the great thing which made the difference between the life her father had fled from, and the Utopia they thought they had come into.

"The men that work for the farmers — they are much the same as in my country. Only it is we who are different, — but we work not for the farmer but for the government — and not for always, — only one year."

"Say, ain't that a difference?" broke in Mamie Epstein. "I'd die being lonesome if I was to have to live here! What 'ud you do after dinner? What'd you do on Sunday? Who you gotta talk to when you ain't workin'? Excuse *me!*"

"I think," said Ruth slowly, "I *think* it could be organized — I think — "

But Mamie broke in again.

"Some ways it ain't as good as Orchard Street. I don't notice it's any easier to keep clean than what it is there — we got about just as many bath tubs as they got and that ain't any so's you'd notice 'em. We get just as good food — and my Mamma she cooks it a lot better than that time Mrs. Linden give me a dinner, cause the bus with the lunch was late."

"They do cook badly," said Quartermaster Farrington, "but then they haven't the variety we have in the city — they — "

"Well, that's up to them. Ain't this the kind of place things grow that you eat!"

The farm hands did appall the girls. Not that there were many of them — for the Service was driving them out — but still some did exist — vestigial remains of an

unorganized civilization that was passing away. They were in startling contrast to the group of industrial workers the girls were used to in the cities; physically large and strong as was necessary to the work they did — physically slow as having no need to keep up with the motions of hurrying machinery but only with the deliberate strides of inevitable nature. No need for them to be well informed, or well dressed, or good citizens, for there was nothing to be gained for them as farm hands by any self-development beyond the physical. There were practically no mental or moral demands in their calling — and small social or financial satisfactions.

"Gee! If it was me I'd rather be workin' by infants' wear in Stanton Street seein' what it does to 'em when they get through," commented Mamie.

But before our Universal Service, the farm hand, even the last remnant of him, tends to vanish, and the farms themselves to shrink to a size that the owner can operate between the stress seasons of seedtime and harvest. And already under the organized help to the farmers, the acreage under cultivation is slowly increasing and the yield per acre going up.

Mildred loved the work. All her life she had been used to being out of doors — riding, tramping, playing games, getting much joy out of the open air. Now she had this same outdoor life in the interests of production — of industry. She kept telling herself that this was the other end of the work John Barton was doing— the work of giving everybody bread — the most important thing in the world.

CHAPTER XIV

WORKING back and forth through the endless green miles of the corn belt, past the pointing white fingers of the scattered churches, gradually northward from one little wood-built town to another, the tractor teams of the Forty-second Unit became increasingly expert.

Mildred following after Edward Fox, the professional worker who drove the first tractor, and followed closely by Sam Wilcox on the third, no longer had any terror of the corners of the fields, — she knew she could turn them safely; she no longer watched her furrows anxiously over her shoulder, — she knew they were straight. There wasn't much chance to talk because the noise of their combined engines was like the sound of aëroplanes in flight, but there was a lot of time to speculate on all the problems that were presenting themselves to her day by day.

This speculation would have been inevitable to a girl of her type and age, but if she had been a New York débutante, as her mother had been, instead of a tractor driver in the Mississippi Valley, it would have turned on her personal concerns — amusements, clothes and particularly marriage — to a far greater extent.

One day they plowed a great rich tract through the middle of which ran a slow, meandering stream, lately snowbound. A Service Corps was busy digging and trenching along the bank of it and Edward Fox signaled to stop.

" Taking the kinks out of the stream," the gang leader told Mildred. " Land here grows too much corn to the acre to let any more of it be under water than we can help. Of course, it isn't as pretty to look at as it was before, I guess we will have to look for beauty somewhere else."

And his glance at Mildred seemed to indicate where it was to be found.

" They tell me it pays well to straighten out the brooks. Somebody in the University of Iowa made an estimate on the number of acres it saved but I couldn't believe it till they put me on this job."

Mildred went back to her tractor with a half-forgotten " golden text " about " making straight His paths " floating in her mind, which drifted off into obscure calculations of the number of corn bread muffins somebody would eat because the curl was taken out of that particular stream.

Another day Winkles came back at night full of excitement.

" There was a little hill — oh, a very little hill — and the men in the uniforms were putting small trees on the top of it — a long row of very small trees. ' Why do you plant trees? ' I said to them. They told me it was so the wind would be kept from the young corn. And that is a wonderful thing in this country, that the government keeps the wind from the young corn! "

And that, too, Mildred thought about while she rode her tractor.

One night in Missouri, their barracks was on the ground of an Agricultural Experiment Station and the recruits stationed there welcomed them with hilarious joy and told them about the experiments they were making in early varieties of corn, and wheat from China, and new fertilizers and ways to circumvent the grasshopper —

these all mixed up with the gossip of the Service, and national politics as interpreted in the light of their eighteen years, and a lot of scattering personalities and some faultfinding.

"What do you think of being eight miles from the movies for four months! Why, I'd even be darn glad to see those before-the-war films of Charley Chaplin!"

"We haven't seen any since we left Minneapolis, either," said Ruth Ansel. "But if it's any comfort to you, I'll tell you about the last ones we saw there."

After an outraged silence the Experiment Station recruits told Ruth what they really thought of her and harmony was restored.

It was the evening after that or the next but one that Mamie said earnestly to Mildred:

"One more young man gets stuck on you, Mildred. Sam Wilcox — ain't it so? Off you he don't take his eyes."

Mildred turned in surprise. They were sewing under the lamp — holes in stockings, rents in skirts, buttons on underwear. Mildred was doing it painstakingly but exceedingly ill, it irked her more than anything in the Service, and she watched enviously the carefree way in which Mamie attacked needle and thread. She could never get used to Mamie's way of talking things out — to her disregard of what was commonly taken for granted or implied or pretended.

"What makes you think Sam Wilcox is stuck on me?" Mildred knew it wasn't any use to fence with Mamie but ancestral reserve made her try.

"Well, why wouldn't he be? All day he sees you on the tractor riding, and every evening coming here."

"Mamie Epstein, what makes you always think somebody is 'stuck' on somebody else? It makes me so uncomfortable! It spoils all the fun!"

"Fun all right it is for you, — but how I worry about it you should know!"

"Nobody *has* to marry!"

Mamie's shrug was a quick arraignment of the whole feminist movement.

"An old maid you think I should be working by shirtwaists till I gotta die! Such plans I ain't got for myself!"

They sewed silently for a while. Ostensibly all Mildred's attention was concentrated upon her rather futile efforts to sew a ripped seam; in reality she was struggling with a sudden fit of physical distaste at the idea of Sam Wilcox being "stuck on her." There was a certain sleek masculinity about Sam, all frank and clear skinned and boyish as he was; that repelled her the moment she saw him in the light of a possible lover. Mamie's words had brought him into quick contrast with Nick — and all her æsthetically critical senses sprang away from his short fingered, clumsy hands, the clumsy, untaught processes of his brain; from his vigorous but ungraceful body; from his innocent but unlovely manners — toward the slender figure of Nick with all its perfection of finish in physical detail — a crisp, definite modeling of the bones as they showed through the not too abundant flesh; the careful marking of his eyebrows; the supple adaptability of his hands; the bodily control that kept him always physically at ease; the consideration of manner bred into him for generations. It all came to Mildred as a wave of feeling rather than of thought. Emotionally she pushed Sam away with outward facing palms. When she brought herself back to the present Mamie was saying:

"With you it's different. All those swell uptown fellers you got a chance to get married to. I bet your

father could give a boy a five thousand dollar check and never make no difference in the housekeeping."

"But I'm not thinking about getting married — not at *all!*"

Mildred stopped suddenly — of course in a way she was thinking of getting married, for there was Nick — but it all seemed very far away and unimportant.

"Honest, Mildred, you make me so tired! Ain't Mr. Barton just waiting till it is October and you get out of the Service? Not that I would say you should take him — understand me — with swell fellows coming to your house and pearls on your mother's neck like they was sold at the ten cent store — that plenty! But Mr. Barton from Minneapolis or Sam Wilcox from San Francisco, would be different for me."

Mildred turned on her suddenly.

"Mamie, you don't mean — "

"Sure, I *do* mean! Never does a young man come along that I don't say to myself, 'Is that the young man you should get married to, Mamie Epstein?' "

"But Sam Wilcox isn't — "

"Sure, I know he's a 'Krist,' but what did my Papa come by America for if I ain't gotta right to marry if I can get him a young man not working by cloaks and suits in New York City?"

"Of course, you've the right, Mamie — but — "

"No rich uptown feller, like some of the girls has got, for how would I get away with it, and his Papa and Mamma and everybody smiling sarcastic? And Mr. Barton from Minneapolis — right away it would be everything like his mother did was all the way there was to do it — understand me?"

"Yes," said Mildred slowly — she was filled with a blind resentment that Mamie should even imply a criticism of her prophet of light.

"But Sam Wilcox, — what is the gents' furnishing business in San Francisco that I gotta put up any pretense of refinement if I got a husband that's in it? Sure, I can get away with the gents' furnishings all right!"

Mildred still sewed valiantly at her seam but she had lost the power of concentrating upon it.

"It ain't that you would get married to him yourself, Mildred — all the grand chances you got. Just entertainment it is, like you was going to the movies."

Outside there was a loud, keen whistling of an intricate syncopated measure with as elaborate ornamentations as the human mouth-parts make possible and Mamie and Mildred raised their heads.

"Ain't I telling you? Every night he comes like it was a rubber band that pulled him?"

"I'll go, Mamie — I'll go upstairs in a moment or two."

Sam Wilcox strolled over and sat as close to Mildred as the mechanical construction of tables and chairs permitted.

"Well, ain't this a cheering sight for a man that's been sewing on his own buttons for six months?"

"And whose buttons would it be you sew on, if it ain't your own buttons," commented Mamie softly.

Sam Wilcox hardly noticed her.

"Makes you feel like you was married and got a home of your own — I guess —"

"Well of all the nerve! Do you think any girl gets married so's to have a license to sew on buttons for nothing? There's more'n a hundred places in New York City where she gets paid for that kind of pleasure in perfectly good money."

Mildred laughed a little nervously.

"Say, ain't it some better'n running a tractor that's liable to balk any minute?"

" I don't like to sew," said Mildred deliberately.

" Oh, I say — but maybe you wouldn't have to — I bet I make good money by the time I'm twenty-one — I — "

Mildred rose hastily and gathered up her unfinished seam.

" I'll take this upstairs," she said.

Mamie watched her go comprehendingly. Sam waited a while in silence and then turned to Mamie.

" Ain't it funny she shouldn't like to sew? "

Mamie was obtrusively diligent with her needle.

" Oh, not so funny you would notice it. Sam Wilcox, do you think it is so nice that a boy should be talking about getting married like it was a new kind of work for his wife! "

" Oh I say, Mamie — I meant — "

" Well, the girl you talk work to, you gotta pick careful! Mildred Carver, if you could see the house she lives in and her Mamma with real pearls, you wouldn't talk sewing on buttons to like it was a great privilege."

" What's pearls! My mother's got a diamond pin and earrings to wear to church."

" Say, what's diamonds for church! I guess Mildred's Papa if he should want a church he could buy it all right! Butlers they have and a swell room to dance in like you rented a hall in Avenue A."

It wasn't clear to Sam Wilcox just what Mamie meant. The mind can only receive what it is prepared to hold, and as far as social distinctions, and financial levels, and the relation of the diamond and the pearl to each other in the social scale, and such like subtleties, the mind of Mr. Sam Wilcox was as unprepared as the unbroken prairie for corn.

" A girl that sews easy before she gets married should like to sew on buttons after she gets a husband. Sewing

I been doing ever since I could make a thread through the hole of a needle go!"

Mamie was only subtle in her receive — her serve was direct and square in the court. There was not even the suspicion of a cut on it, but it got by Sam.

Mamie's fingers speeding the needle in and out were obvious, they flashed and danced before the eyes of Sam Wilcox. The thread mended and buttons flew into place like pictures drawing themselves on a movie screen, — but the boy looked persistently toward the staircase down which Mildred might reasonably be expected to return.

"Your Mamma has some more boys?" Mamie's voice was gutturally sweet.

"No such luck for the old lady, — thought when she saw what I was like she couldn't make no improvements."

"Say, you don't hate yourself! But some girls she's got?"

"Nope — only yours truly!"

"Ain't it grand she should have diamond pins and everything!"

"She looks all right when she's dressed up, too. I say to her, 'Ma, look at the fellows watching you, they think I got a new girl,' — just like that."

"Oh, ain't you sassy by your Mamma!"

"She likes it, you bet — but what's eating Mildred — ain't she coming back?"

There was a pause full of Mamie's marshaling of reenforcements.

"Resting after the sewing, I guess she is. If you ain't used to sewing on buttons, more than running tractors it makes you tired."

"Well — I guess I'll be goin'! I'm some done up myself."

Mamie sewed slowly after Sam had gone — sewed

while she reviewed the situation. There was no sensitiveness in her appreciation of the fact that she obviously hadn't even got the rays of Sam's matrimonial headlights deflected in her direction. Sam looked to her about like the thing she could get away with. She folded her sewing with smart speed and went to join some girls under the further lamp. They were poring over the fashions in the back of a woman's magazine.

"Say, ain't it fierce the way somebody else's always froze onto anything you want?" she complained.

"What's the matter, Mamie?"

"Well, there's those styles in ladies' trotteur suits, and there's that coat in chinchilla — would I be getting them do you think? And I bet I marry a gink that works by pants in Rivington Street, after all!"

CHAPTER XV

THE U. S. A. wears the Corn Belt like a girdle of glory with her summer dresses. Every year when she has brushed off the white powder that she puts on for the winter's gayeties, she looks to the resetting and polishing of this chief treasure. Each flat, square mile must be made ready for its enameling of green, each thoroughfare and by-road must be polished smooth to make easy the way of the crops.

The Forty-second Unit of the Eleventh Corps of the Agricultural Service, swinging rapidly north before the drive of a luminary, insistently bent on lengthening the growing day of the crops — came into a region of new government roads flung down hastily like Sir Walter's cloak before their rumbling busses. Gangs of husky brown boys worked upon them under the supervision of trained road-makers and one morning as Mildred climbed to the seat of her tractor, Nick Van Arsdale jerked up straight from his work; ran across the meadow and cried:

"Hullo, Mildred," just as she started the motor.

There was no stopping then but when Mildred got fairly under way she laughed back at him — a serene young figure in khaki, her blond braid held by a blue ribbon and the morning breeze blowing little tendrils of gold about her sunburned ears. And Nick felt a tear that lodged under the corner of his eyelid spill over at the courage of the laugh she sent back. Think of her having to work on a farm — she, who had always had every little thing in the world done for her and ought to have

been carefully taken care of always! How she must hate it, and yet smiling at him like that! Work was a different thing for a man. As the tractor vanished over a little rise in a cloud of dust, Nick walked across to the farm house. The farmer's wife was most willing to talk to this handsome service lad.

"They'll be back for lunch about nine. Oh, no, we don't feed 'em. We just give 'em a place to eat in. See those boxes? That's their lunch. It came by the bus this morning. When they've had it, they'll go to work again and at half-past twelve the bus'll be along bringing them that's to work in the afternoon and takin' them that's here back. How do we get 'em to come? Why, we have to plant the crops that the government expert tells us to. At first some of us stuck out for doing as we'd always done; but we couldn't get the government help for the plowing and harrowing and planting in the spring, or the cutting and binding and threshing in the summer; and such as had it got way ahead of us. Yes, they do pretty fair. There's trained men in charge to tell 'em how. What? — oh, yes, all the machines belong to them. Of course, the work don't take much judgment. I guess if you know how to run an automobile you can't go far wrong on it. But my — the difference it makes in the crops! Pay? — why, of course we pay by the acre and they bring as many people and as many machines as they need. No, this is the first work this lot has done in the county — they come over to Kirksville yesterday. Isn't that where you're put up?"

Nick, tramping over to the barracks where the Forty-second Unit was quartered, as soon as he had helped to wash the dishes and brush up the crumbs, had a great warm feeling around his heart. Mildred and he would talk together of the people in New York and he would

tell her about how they really made roads and the time the engine boiler exploded and what it was like to " drag " the roads in dry weather, and — oh, a lot of things. And then it occurred that he would kiss her, of course — didn't one naturally kiss the girl one was going to marry? And a quick feel of that first kiss of theirs — way, way back there when they were both so young — nearly six months ago — came to Nick and he hastened his steps.

But the sitting room of the barracks was full of people — not only the girls who lived there, but the boys of the Unit and several men from his own section and even from Kirksville had made excuses to drop in. Mildred did jump up and come running toward him and held out her hand but there was nothing particularly satisfying about a mere hand. He whispered to her to come out doors with him. But there were little hitches — she had to inform Quartermaster Farrington that she was going out, and get her coat, and write her name on the " on leave " list before they could slip out through the door by themselves. The cold air struck them like a rushing river — air fresh from the still frozen heights of the Canadian border and taking all their extra energy to meet and combat it. So when Nick, safe at last in a protecting shadow, slid his arm around Mildred and bent to meet her lips, it was in the mid stream of a rushing air current that was like the Mississippi in flood. No soft arms went up round his neck as they had in the insidious perfume-laden summer mist. No! What he got was a rather unsatisfactory peck in the midst of wild catches at hat and flying hair. And as for its being the soft ending of a languorous day that had had nothing much but Mildred in it anyway, why it was just something added to a day already filled with hard physical exertion. They were not any longer two young people with nothing to do but fall

in love in a sense-compelling setting, but extraordinarily busy recruits set primarily on the adventure of work.

To Mildred, Nick had never seemed so attractive. She had been all these months with people whose small ways were less charming and graceful — but a new coquetry had developed in her. She could not quite define it in herself; it was as though she were quite ready to admit her engagement to him as an academic proposition, but not as a working hypothesis. She somehow pushed their relations into a state of quite unaccustomed uncertainty bewildering to Nick, for all she was so glad to see him. They couldn't stay out doors indefinitely clinging to each other under such emotionally adverse conditions. There was nothing for it but to come back to the lamp-lit barrack-room and the chattering group around the stove.

Mildred took it all in good part — too good, Nick thought, considering that he was ordered away tomorrow and this was their one evening together. And so because he was hurt and disappointed, he threw himself into talk with Sam Wilcox and Winkles and a gesticulating, curly-headed young Italian, and talked roads and farm machinery and planting; and criticized the food, and raged at the regulations, and guyed the officers, and altogether showed himself such a charming and normal and lovable young man that the whole group could hardly let him go when the nine o'clock bugle blew.

And Nick, dull eyed, went back to his barracks and made a humble comparison of himself with Sam Wilcox, who had shown proprietary symptoms. Was not Sam as good looking? As intelligent? Might he not sometime be as rich — or if he were not, did that matter to Mildred Carver? And there was this Barton they'd been talking about that evening as though he were the king pin of the whole country. Same man Mildred had

written about from Minneapolis. That Mamie Epstein raved about him too, but not so much as Mildred. You'd think girls would find something new to talk about! Probably he was just another of these men that were in love with Mildred! Feeling shorn of any inherent merits that might make her prefer him after she had a chance to choose, he went to bed with the realization of how Mildred's matrimonial outlook had widened. Of course he knew that almost any girl had a greater choice of husbands than a rich girl in society. The men she may appropriately marry are within a very narrow circle, the greatest pains are taken to see that she meets no one outside it, and most of the men in the world are outside. Nick knew all these things and cursed the way his particular section of the universe was constructed as he fell asleep.

And Mildred, combing out her long, blond hair, thought how splendid Nick was about work that she knew he didn't care for at all. Of course, Nick was part of the big job, too — for if they didn't have good roads how would they get about to plant the crops? He wasn't important like Mr. Barton, and after his year he would go back to all kinds of things that didn't matter, while Mr. Barton would keep right on helping to make flour. Mildred blushed at the mere coupling of the two names in her own mind — and Mamie Epstein coming across for a last good-night gossip, caught the blush and the self-conscious look in Mildred's eyes and made a quick misinterpretation.

"You and me was saying last week a girl ain't got to be in a hurry to get married, but such a young man as Mr. Van Arsdale any girl can be lucky to get."

Mildred, jarred out of her little tender reverie, turned suddenly.

"Mamie — I won't hear you talk all the time about boys and getting married! And I wish you'd let me alone!"

Mamie dropped her lower jaw in surprise, — what was there about matrimonial probabilities different from any of the other affairs of life, that one should not speak about them? Why, wasn't it a flattering attention to rate another person's chances high in the marriage market? She rose in a slow bewilderment.

"Well, you needn't throw a hate on me because I say you got a chance to get married to Mr. Van Arsdale. He got such a respect off-a-you, I bet you don't have it just friends with him if you don't like it. I —"

Mildred turned again in a sudden flash.

"Stop!" she cried.

And Mamie stopped.

So the little idyl which fortune flung them in this chance meeting, she snatched back again and left nothing but a sense of mutual exasperation.

Mildred lay for a long time enjoying a great variety of conflicting and more or less undefined sensations. So Mamie thought it was "just friends" between her and Nick, did she? Well, that showed how little Mamie knew about it! But then Mamie was usually right about such things as personal relationships — think of the time she knew for a week beforehand how Winkles was mad at Miss Farrington, and nobody else even suspected it! But of course she didn't know this time. The picture of John Barton came slowly on the screen of her mind, but she turned it back hastily as though it had no business appearing unbidden or in that connection. And then for safety from her own emotions, she thought of her work, and that was a comforting thing, for she was beginning to have ideas on an improvement of the grip handles of

her control levers and she wanted to talk with the Captain of the Unit next day and see if he didn't agree with her,— and her mind grew hazy, hearing the Captain say:

"That is a wonderful idea, Miss Carver — wonderful! All our engineers together never thought of a thing like that! It will revolutionize farm tractors!"

And very dimly indeed she saw the other girls filled with admiration and further off Nick registering awed wonder and just as the dark of sleep closed over her, John Barton said something about the noble work of feeding the world — only she was too far away to hear distinctly.

CHAPTER XVI

DEAR MOTHER :—

"You know our second vacation week comes next month. I want awfully to see you and father and Ruthie and Junior, but it's such a terribly long way to New York that I'd have to be traveling most of my vacation if I went home. So couldn't you all come to Minneapolis which is just a little way off, and spend the vacation there with me? Please, *please* do! You've so much more time than I have. You could be there when I came and we'd have a whole week together. You know you haven't a thing to do and I have to begin the harvesting right after vacation. We'll just have the *best* time. All the other girls are going home because their mothers and fathers can't come on — and they are kicking about it like anything, but it's either that or stay in barracks and loaf. And there isn't the least reason in the world why you can't come — So do it, Mother dear, oh, *Please.*"

Mrs. Carver read this letter to her husband at breakfast after Junior and Ruth had gone to school.

"How absurd the child is! As though I had nothing to do!" she commented laughing — "and Junior's teeth being straightened."

"It *would* take most of her time to get here and back again," said Frank, laying down his paper and addressing himself to his hothouse melon. "Wouldn't you like to run out there, Mary? We could go on to the coast if you cared to."

"I can't possibly, Frank. All the things I'm interested in are just finishing up then — it's the very end of the season and you know I'm planning to get a new housekeeper for Torexo — if it were a month later — "

"It isn't! I think, Mary, I'll go. There's nothing here I can't leave for a fortnight or so — Jameson is pretty efficient."

"Oh, that *would* be nice! You'd have quite a lark off there together. I know Mildred would *love* it. And be sure you tell her all you can about Nick — for after all, Frank, nothing could be more suitable. We may just as well face the fact, Frank. — Mildred's the type that's quite certain to attract men. I could see that it had already begun when I was in Minneapolis — and of course, quite awful things could happen with her meeting everybody like this. Not that bad enough things aren't possible when perfectly good boys of people we know are as dull as Arthur Wintermute. But I'm getting to feel as though Nick were a sort of life preserver, and I don't want him to get out of reach. If things were as they were before the war I wouldn't be so much concerned, but now people like us seem to be standing on quicksand. Be sure you keep Nick in her mind all the time you're there — will you, Frank? "

Frank Carver, planning to give his daughter the happiest sort of vacation, found himself suddenly wondering what she would like to do. He knew what she had liked as a little girl, — fishing and riding and games and mechanical toys; but something told him that her tastes might be changing. Well, anyway, she was probably as fond of candy as ever — and on his way to the train he laid in a stock of the most wonderful sweets New York could provide. And then on a sudden shamefaced impulse, born of the fact that the sun glared distressingly

from the newly sprinkled pavement, he stopped his motor before a shop window that displayed parasols, and bought a wonderful confection of satin and lace with a handle of ivory. He didn't feel that the purchases which his man carried into the train after him were at all adequate; he was confessedly humble minded about them, but he hadn't known what else to bring.

He sat in the pullman eyeing the parasol box morosely and trying to think what Mildred would like to do in this vacation week of hers. There were the theaters — but he wasn't sure whether Minneapolis had any that were good. They could get a motor, of course — Mildred had always had a car; and there was the river — and there might be ball games or tennis matches or something. Frank Carver began to get panicky as the train carried him west — what was he going to do with this girl of his, that he had been a stranger to for half a year? There was nothing but the resources of a great city and plenty of money to amuse her with, and he began to feel helpless. And after all her work she must need amusement! He began to consider the parasol box hopelessly. If he only knew the town better! Why had she happened to pick out Minneapolis, anyway? Was it the nearest large city? He sent the porter for a railroad map. No, it wasn't the nearest to the last address she had given — not by some inches on the map! Omaha and Kansas City were nearer and Chicago wasn't any further away! What possessed the child to pick out that place! As though she hadn't had enough of it when she was working in the flour mill! Strange thing for her to do! He got the explanation the second day.

Mildred came down to breakfast with her hat on and began to hurry her breakfast.

"I'll just run over to the mill, father, while you're reading your paper," she remarked casually.

"What mill?" he inquired in surprise.

"Why, the mill I worked in!" she answered with a surprise greater than his own — could there be more than one mill she would want to see?

"All right, daughter — I'll be ready in a few minutes."

"Oh, no, father," her consternation was evident. "Oh, no!" and then more gently, "I wouldn't feel comfortable to make you go way out there."

Frank Carver was somewhat disconcerted. In effect his daughter had told him that she didn't want him along.

"Very well!" he said quietly, "just push the cream this way, please — thank you — I'll wait till you come back," and seeing Mildred rise, "Waiter, call a taxi."

"Oh, father! A taxi! I'd feel so queer when we always walked!"

"I'd rather you'd take one, my dear — and then you'll be back sooner. Taxi's here, is it? Thank you."

He rose and escorted his young recruit through the lobby, put her in the cab, as a daughter of the Carvers had always been installed in her chariot, and closed the door.

"Wait and bring the lady back, driver. What's the address, Mildred? Just the government flour mill? You know it, do you, driver? Very well."

He felt the incongruousness of it — a sort of double-edged incongruousness. Here was the carefully guarded daughter of his house going alone and quite unprotected in a mere public conveyance to visit a manufacturing plant; but here was also a recruit in the government service wearing the uniform of the United States, being timorously conveyed to the place where she had been employed in a privately hired taxicab. Looking after her till the cab turned the corner, he was conscious of a

distressing lack of coördination in his thinking parts. Back at his table he sat idly stirring his coffee, disconcerted and a little hurt. He had intended to give Mildred the parasol after breakfast — it was just the sort of day when he thought a girl would like one to carry — but, of course, it would have been out of place in a flour mill. When she got back —

It was almost noon before she came into their little sitting room, showing no consciousness of any particular obligation to have returned earlier.

"Did you have a good time?" there was a certain intent of irony in Frank Carver's question, but his daughter didn't perceive it.

"Oh, father — isn't the way they make things perfectly *wonderful!* There were a lot of things I didn't understand about the mill while I was in it — ways the machines worked, you know, and exactly what they did. Of course, I was only sewing up sacks, anyway."

"Didn't you ever go through it all?"

"Lots of times — only I didn't understand it. But working with the tractor and having to clean the engine and all the plows and harrows and things — why it makes me know a lot about the way machines work! Mr. Barton took me all over it again today and told me about everything and I found I understood much better."

"Who is Mr. Barton?"

"Why, he's the foreman!"

Frank felt the surprise in her tones. It was as though he had asked, "Who is Edison?"

Mildred curled up in an overstuffed chair, tossed her hat on the table and began to talk about farm and mill machinery with an unconscious command of the specialized vocabulary which left her father gasping. Valves and controls and differentials and a whole catalogue of

terms that he knew by reputation only, not by personal introduction, seemed to be the familiars of his blue-eyed daughter. He asked her a question now and then just to keep her talking, and all the time he was studying the new thing she had become in mixed wonder and appreciation. Mildred was just saying:

"The trouble with the older form of hopper appears to be the difficulty of readjusting it quickly. If you have to disconnect it —"

When he happened to glance through the door of his bedroom and see the parasol box! He remembered how the clerk who had sold it to him had floated and serpentined about in her high-heeled boots, fluttering its frills. Potentially she stood in ruffled silk beside a lagoon, dropping crumbs to swimming swans! At least he had had that sort of a Watteau picture of his daughter when he bought the thing. But Mildred sat before him in the flesh, dressed in brown khaki buttoned to the throat. Her knees were crossed and she swung one thick-booted foot back and forth and she talked of lubricating graphite and the waste of power in changing gears! It seemed an inappropriate moment for parasols and they went to lunch.

The next morning she announced serenely:

"I'm going to dinner with Mr. Barton to-morrow night. You won't mind if I leave you, will you, Father? You see I haven't seen him for nearly four months."

Frank Carver was acutely conscious that girls of eighteen are not supposed to dine alone in restaurants with men; but looking into the clear eyes of his khaki-clad girl, he realized, that for a citizen serving her country, for a girl who had driven a traction engine from the 30th to the 45th parallel of latitude, who has watched the sun rise from the southern bayous to the northern

hills, chaperones and what they implied were forever obsolete.

So Mildred dined with the foreman and afterward they went to a moving picture show, and at ten o'clock he escorted her back to the hotel and was met by Frank waiting by seeming accident in the lobby.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Carver. I had the pleasure of being introduced to your wife last year," said John Barton with amiable condescension. "Your daughter here tells me you've come clear from New York to pass the week with her — some trip!"

"Yes," said Frank Carver feebly.

"You holding down a job that will wait till you get back?"

"Yes," repeated Frank, trying to adjust himself to the rôle of somebody's employee.

"What's your line?"

The multitudinous magnate made a hasty survey of his crowding interests and hazarded:

"Steel."

"Didn't know there were any steel mills in New York."

"Well, no. They aren't exactly in the city."

"I suppose you can get me a chance to go through them when I come to New York?"

"I — yes, I think so. Are you coming soon?"

"Well, not exactly what you would call *soon,* I guess. Some time along in the fall if there's anybody there would care to see me."

Mildred, smiling quietly, didn't seem to grasp the full significance of the talk, but the men, looking straight into each other's eyes, understood perfectly.

Of course it wasn't to be thought of! Frank Carver knew that. This man was a foreman in the flour mill with the training that fitted him for that work, and his

daughter was Miss Carver of New York — but suppose, just for the sake of argument, that they had been of the same social and financial level! Frank felt — and he prided himself on a knowledge of men — that John Barton was the type he would have chosen for a son-in-law. But it was a question that, of course, he could only consider academically.

Frank didn't sleep much that night — there seemed no special need for it. He was too busy thinking out this new difficulty to notice how the hours slid by. For the foreman was in love with Mildred — there was no question about that! Did Mildred know it? He wasn't sure. But undoubtedly John Barton was the determining factor that had drawn her to Minneapolis. Here was probably the root of Mildred's interest in machinery. Such things weren't natural to girls of her age. And then suddenly he saw her married to the foreman, the wife of a mechanic! He had many such in his employ. The man was paid probably about three thousand dollars a year and he would keep on earning it, with good fortune and no accidents, till he was past fifty. After that age the experience of the companies in which he was interested showed that a lack of physical alertness made a man an unsatisfactory employee in a factory. Of course there was the government pension — Frank Carver didn't remember just how much that was. It wasn't the money — there was money enough for his daughter no matter whom she married. It was a question of the kind of life implied by it all. He had a vision of tiny front halls with oilcloth in them, wives in gingham aprons, laden clothes lines in crowded back yards — this was the sort of thing John Barton would take for granted. And then he thought of the white parasol! She would carry it — to church! And she would carry it perpetually without

regard to changing fashions or suitability simply because the duplication of such things in the lifetime of a foreman's wife was impossible. And then he thought how delightfully the lace fluttered around the edge, and how the carved dragon on the handle turned and twisted; and how, lovely as it was, it was as nothing to what his daughter could have if she chose; and he wondered if all the things the parasol represented would together prove a lure to this girl who had always had so much that going without might seem an adventure. He couldn't let her marry the foreman of a mill. It was out of the question — but in these three days he had discovered his daughter grown into an independent individual. His final conclusion was that he had best talk it out with Mildred herself — in his state of nervous fatigue that seemed a satisfying determination and under the wing of it he managed to go to sleep.

He woke with the obligation to talk it out with Mildred as strong about him as a prison. Everything in the day must be bent to that. He had set the package containing the parasol resolutely away in the wardrobe in his room. But breakfast didn't seem a good time. Mildred was so blue-eyed, red-lipped and golden-haired! She ate her grapefruit with such childish relish; she deluged her oatmeal with cream in such a consciously reprehensible way; she stole his extra toast so obviously, and laughed at him so charmingly when he pretended to be surprised at not finding it; and was so altogether bewitching even to a father, that Frank Carver decided not to mention it till breakfast was over. And then Mildred was just in the mood to keep on playing, and they decided to go out to Lake Minnetonka, which neither of them had seen, and Mildred hoped it would be like Coney Island because she had never been

there, and Frank hoped it wouldn't because he had. And they motored out through the fresh heat of the early summer, and that was no time to talk it out, and when the chauffeur stopped with the lake spread out before them, there, coming to the dock, was a boat with a high double deck and the slightly inebriated carriage as of a man likely to lose his balance; and when the boat whistled in a deep bass voice quite out of keeping with its size, it visibly lost headway from the effort. People were running down the pier to get aboard and Mildred wanted to go too, so they dashed after the crowd and found places on the after deck. And of course it wasn't a good place to talk it out with so many people about — though Frank thought he had made a mistake in not bringing the parasol, for this would have been the time to use it.

Another girl in uniform smiled at Mildred and asked what Service she was in.

" I'm in the telegraph," she offered, " and maybe they'll put me in the wireless division when I go back."

" Is it your vacation, too? "

" Yes, and it seems as if I'd just got home and had to go right back again! "

The freemasonry of the Service kept them talking and Frank found himself drawn in, and then some other people who were with the telegraph girl came across to join them in the simplest, most friendly way and they all talked together, nonsense, and personalities and politics and told alleged funny stories and tried to guess riddles and chewed gum and at last began to sing popular songs and eat peanuts and candy, and Mildred brought out a box of superlative sweets which she had tucked into the motor, and they all exclaimed at it and called it " grand " but quite evidently preferred peanut brittle when it came to eating, and had altogether a most innocent middle-class

time, and Frank Carver, joining in the singing and ordering relays of pop and ginger ale for the company, enjoyed himself hugely, but didn't find it a good time to talk it out with Mildred. They landed way up the lake in a grassy cove to wait till the boat came back again. And here Mildred began to pick wild flowers and led him wandering up a shaded path and into a meadow where two friendly rabbits loped off as they came. There was, whenever they mounted a little rise, — the sense of a limitless land only half tamed to human service.

" I'm glad," said Mildred lightly, " that I don't have to plow it all."

They were alone now and the afternoon sun worked out intricate problems in triangulation with the trees. But Mildred was still gathering flowers and chattering of this and that and it seemed a pity to break her fun by talking it out just then.

The path led them deceitfully back to the boat landing, and then it pleased Mildred to sit on the grass and make her wildflowers into a wreath, and put it on her father's head; and a slightly bald gentleman in a straggling, tickling wreath is in no position to talk anything out with anybody. And then the boat whistle was heard around the point of the land and Frank, hastily divesting himself of his wreath, assumed such dignity as he could at short notice, and followed his frivolous-minded, giggling daughter across the gang plank. And the crowd going back sang the same songs and ate peanuts and drank pop in the same hilarious light-heartedness, and Mildred and her father again became part of the fun; and they both went almost to sleep going home in the motor, and when they got back to the hotel they had just energy left to get to bed — and here was the whole day gone and things hadn't been talked out yet!

That boat trip was a disconcerting thing for Frank Carver. He had met plenty of middle-class and working people in his life, but not as being one of them. Usually they had been people he employed. He had rather taken it for granted that he and his kind bore distinguishing signs — subtleties of accent and manner, which would inevitably mark them off from other folks, but if it was so, these people didn't know it. They simply took him and Mildred for granted, and for Mildred this did not satisfy him, as how could one know if these were all people his daughter ought to meet? But for himself he enjoyed it hugely — was it not an adventure in the middle class?

The next morning Frank Carver took himself firmly in hand. Here he had hardly mentioned Nick Van Arsdale and he had promised Mary that he would keep him continually in Mildred's mind; he hadn't presented the parasol which might be taken as a symbol of the life that marriage with Nick implied; he hadn't stood between Mildred and her perfectly impossible admirer; he hadn't even talked the matter over with his daughter — which was about the least that a father could expect of himself. He told himself that he must do better than this.

That night he privately arranged to take Mildred to St. Paul for what he hoped wouldn't be an any-worse-than-usual musical show, and told her about it afterward. Just as he was ordering a motor, which he took as much for granted as his shoes, Mildred interfered.

"Oh, Father, let's take the trolley. We always take the trolley in the Service and it's such fun."

Her father didn't think it fun but this was Mildred's vacation, not his. And when a violent thunder storm put the electric power system temporarily out of business on the way home and left them for an hour in the midst of

sloshing rain, and flashing light, he bore it very well, and explained as far as his knowledge went, just what happened in case of a short circuit and what the electricians were probably doing about it at that moment. It might have been a good chance to talk it over with Mildred, — they were in the comparative privacy of a trolley car with only a dozen or so extraneous people — but when a man is trying to satisfy the bright and inquiring mind of his offspring on a subject which he only half understands, he is in no position to be impressive.

And when they finally got back to their hotel they found that John Barton had called and left his name — not his card — with the clerk.

Frank Carver suggested various forms of entertainment for the next evening but Mildred hadn't been able to decide which she preferred — they were still discussing it at their dinner — when the boy from the lobby came to their table and announced " Mr. Barton calling."

That evening spent with John Barton in their little hotel sitting room taught Frank Carver several things. He saw that not only was the man utterly ignorant of the social and financial position of his daughter, but that he didn't know the real Mildred at all. Her mind, her disposition, her experiences, her tastes, were things with which he didn't even concern himself. He loved in her the beautiful promise of the intelligent, housekeeping, child-raising wife which would fulfill his dream of what life should be. Frank Carver was learning that his daughter was an elaborately differentiated individual; John Barton saw Mildred only as his particular feminine complement. If Mildred could understand this, it might solve his problem. Decidedly he must talk it out with her.

It was evident also that Mildred gave John Barton no more chance to find out what she thought and felt than

as though she had been in his congregation in church. She listened and she responded, that was all, and there was enough of the preacher in John Barton to make him content with this.

The next day was their last in Minneapolis and Frank felt that he had discharged his trust from Mary so ill that he had better go with Mildred to her first stopping place. When she was actually at the field work and out of John Barton's sphere of influence, he might really get a chance to give her the advice she had a right to have. He couldn't go back to New York with that sense of failure on him.

And just as they were following the porter with their bags out of the door, the chambermaid, intent on collecting a tip, appeared in the offing. Frank put his hand in his pocket and then a slow flush rose to his face. He stepped quickly up to the girl and spoke very low:

"There's a package in the closet in my room — a parasol — it's for you."

CHAPTER XVII

AT midsummer the great wheat harvest stands just between full eared perfection and the dropping of the dead ripe grain to the ground, which is Nature's naïve way of preparing for next year's spring. Between Nature and her thriftless intention rush a hundred thousand boys and girls with steam-fed steeds and chariots breathing gasoline.

Frank Carver, following discreetly after the troop bus which carried his daughter out to the fields just as the sun drove red-hot darts vertically into the baking prairie, thought that civilization had still a long way to go before farm labor would become an occupation he would choose for his daughter.

When he finally passed through the cloud of dust that rose behind the bus like the noonday ghost of drought, he saw Mildred trying her levers, making sure that everything worked and then mounting above those unreasonably formidable wheels and bars and chains, throw in her clutch with the swift certainty of a professional and start away across the prairie with a great grain cutting machine clanking and clattering at her heels.

The farm they were to reap was divided into comparatively small fields, so instead of their usual three tractor team, Mildred and Winkles were sent out together, — Winkles in the lead and Mildred taking the dust. The great machines crawled up and down over the gentle roll of the prairie; up and down, on and on toward nothing more final than a cobwebby wire fence in the distance and

some tentative sticks of trees, trying obligingly to acclimate themselves where nothing but human preference gave them any reason for growing. Not a dreary landscape since it was yielding generously under the plow, but with all the deadly monotony of assured adventureless comfort. The reapers went on till the noise of their engines came to Frank Carver like the buzzing of a bluebottle, then turned over a little hill and disappeared.

Frank Carver got thoughtfully into his car again and told the driver to take him back to the barracks. Here he sought out Quartermaster Alice Farrington and began to ask her questions. She was a square, direct woman with clear eyes that met you fairly, a woman would have handed her baby to her with certainty that it would be content, a man would have given her the keys to his strong box if not to his heart; a mother would have welcomed her as the bride of an only son — can I say more, except that the only son probably wouldn't have married her?

"When will my daughter be back?" Frank inquired.

Alice Farrington, taking stock of his gray lounge suit, of the gray hat exactly matching it and the soft dust coat dropped over a chair arm, listening to the clear, precise English where every word was a perfect entity developed for a particular purpose and not to be used for any other or weakened by careless intermingling; placed him rightly as a privileged person.

"Not till after seven on this shift — we get in twelve good hours of daylight work now."

"And then?"

"Dinner as soon as they've washed up."

Frank Carver winced — "washed up" was a phrase he had heard his mill-hands use.

"And bed as soon after nine as they can be persuaded to go."

"And between dinner and bed?"

"Oh, usually some of the boys and men come from their barracks or the girls walk out in the evening — or they sing or dance if they feel like it."

"Are there — guests — every evening?"

"Whenever they care to come."

"But only those you know — only recruits in the Service?"

"Oh, no! Anybody any of them know — people they happen to meet, if they choose to ask them."

Frank Carver heard himself gasp.

"But young girls! — Are they always people they ought to meet?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, people you would ask to your home — people whose character — men especially — "

He felt himself floundering distressfully.

"Oh, *that!* Well, in the sense you mean probably not. But don't you think everybody ought to know every kind of people?"

"But young girls — Miss Farrington!"

"Recruits in the government Service, Mr. Carver!"

Frank stirred impatiently.

"It seems to me," said Alice Farrington, smoothing the blue cotton over her knees, "that we are long past the stage where the gospel of 'hush' can be preached to any of us any more. We've got to know what kind of people and what kind of things actually exist in the world we're living in. These girls aren't children. Most of them have had a lot of experience already."

What the quartermaster said filled Frank with a vague alarm. He had been bred in the tradition that young girls should be shielded and guarded from even a knowledge of the unsavory things of life, much more from actual

personal contact with them. But this unrestricted social intercourse had already been going on for more than six months and though Mildred was undoubtedly different as a result of it, she wasn't changed for the worse. Looking at Alice Farrington he felt reassured as to the outcome although he profoundly distrusted the means.

"As a matter of fact," she continued definitely, "we have had surprisingly little trouble — far less than with the same number of girls at home. There isn't much temptation to sex irregularities, because they're all so busy that there isn't any dullness to relieve in that way; and they aren't forced to it to earn a living because that's provided for in the Service. Of course, we occasionally come upon abnormal types — boys and girls both — and then we send them to the hospital camps for observation. No, we have practically no girls becoming mothers while they're in the Service. It's good training here — it works!"

Frank felt himself turning sick and cold at the suggestion, — even the suggestion that such things could happen in the same Service where his daughter was!

That very day Mildred came back with the story of a real adventure. Winkles and she had finished one field and were driving their machines across an open space arranged for the feeding of steers and hogs to be fattened for the Chicago packers. Down the middle of it was a sort of giant lunch counter on which the ration for the steers was already spread. The girls were running their tractors across this empty space toward the next field they were to reap when Mildred's machine was taken with an internal convulsion and stopped, shuddering. Both the girls were down on the ground peering under the balking engine, when the gates at the further edge of the field were opened and a wave of spreading horns and trampling hoofs started toward them.

"Quick, Mildred, quick! Go back up, quick!" cried Winkles.

They scrambled up desperately to their seats before the terrifying charge of the hungry steers and the drove of squealing hogs, twice their number, that ran with them. Mildred tried to be ashamed of her fright and cheer up Winkles.

"Of course, they won't hurt us, Winkles — it's — it's just because they're so hungry. Oh, keep off! Stop! — Go away, you awful thing!"

A great roan beast had seemed to think that Mildred's tractor was a sort of side table set for his private delectation.

"It is true perhaps they do not eat girls, Mildred — but there are more ways to die than by eating! Look what they do there!"

The steers crowded around the tables, horning and shouldering each other, sometimes getting their hoofs upon the table in their eagerness, and kicking and trampling the squealing hogs who could only get the grain that fell from the table.

"We might get down and run to the fence —" suggested Mildred.

"No — they can run faster than we — think how they came, like stones down the mountain side!"

"Oh — oh — Winkles! — oh, they're eating it all up! Oh, they'll come over here — oh!"

They did! They wandered around in seeming abstraction and the girls came in for a share of their careless attention. One enterprising animal with an investigative spirit toward machinery caused Winkles to see approaching dissolution and she screamed again and again.

And then out of the sunset came a figure sitting a great white horse — a figure haloed with light, vast, shouldered like Launcelot — and trotted toward them.

"Say, don' be scare!" he called when he was near enough. "Dey don' hurt you!"

To the girls he was nevertheless a rescuing paladin because in reality he was a particularly good looking Swedish farm hand working on the ranch.

"Dey don' hurt," he repeated with a slow smile.

His way of hustling the feeding beasts about with a stick struck them as a wonderful piece of heroism.

"Now you go all right," he said after he had cleared a path.

But the girls were too shaken to come down, and besides, the hogs of which he seemed to take no account also looked dangerous to them. So after further consideration he dismounted, carried first Winkles and then Mildred to his great white horse and led it to the field where the bus waited. To their relieved thanks he responded with a slow smile and the cryptic remark:

"I come."

The next evening he did come bearing votive offerings of orchard fruits. As he entered the barracks Winkles looked up at him with obvious delight — there was a frankness about her that precluded blushes — but her eyes were like the topaz and the black diamond rolled into one. Not one of the boys in the Unit was like him — a Son of the Morning and great as the gods of the hills! She was no tribe purist — this girl from the edge of Syria. Her fathers had gladly sold their daughters into the harems of the Orient for a thousand years and there was family pride if the price was high! She had no predilection for squat, swarthy men of her own race when she saw something better.

But unfortunately the big Swede was less cosmopolitan. His ideal was buxom with blue eyes and light hair like the girls he had known in Sweden. So his eyes trav-

eled past Winkles to where Mildred sat on the far window seat with her father, and his slow feet followed his quick eyes.

"You vas Svede?" he inquired, quite ignoring her introduction to Frank as he seated himself beside her. "No! Your mutter, she vas Svede? No! Born dis country? Come now, you make fool mit me!"

A great golden giant mounted on a huge steed and with the lines of flexing muscles molding the loose shirt that covered them to beauty, is quite a different person from a huge farm hand in his best clothes, green ready-made tie, and shiny yellow shoes. But a little of the glamour of the rescuing knight still hung round him — and besides wasn't he too in the great work of feeding the world? So Mildred talked with him so prettily and drew Winkles in so tactfully that an immense interest in cattle and hogs and corn and wheat and all the other affairs of farming, seemed to spring up of itself; and the laborer was made to see himself as the focus of a brilliant intellectual effort, and as sending off quite unprecedented conversational sparkles. It was a flattering view of himself and he evidently enjoyed it.

The next night he came again. Mildred feeling that her previous efforts were all that even a rescuer could expect, tried to turn him over to the willing Winkles. But he didn't turn! It was Mildred's blue eyes and blond braids that drew him, — he had a purely provincial taste in girls.

The third evening when he appeared ruminatively at the barracks, Frank Carver took his daughter by the arm and led her resolutely into the moonlight. Evidently he had got to talk it out with Mildred, and that at once!

But the girl seemed so glad to come, so relieved to be away from both the towering Swede and Sam Wilcox

who still pervaded the middle distance in spite of Mamie Epstein's efforts, that he felt reassured. She wasn't encouraging these men anyway, at least no more than the spirit of adventure prompted. But still it ought to be done!

"Mildred," he began, conversationally poising himself like a boxer, ready to spring either way, "it seems to me that a girl in the Service needs to have a pretty steady head — so many unexpected things happen to her."

"You mean those steers? I was afraid of them but not so afraid as Winkles. You should have heard her scream! But when that man — Lindens is his name, isn't it? — when he came and pushed them about just the way I saw a woman 'shoo' chickens in Kansas — why then I saw they weren't dangerous."

"They're dangerous enough, Mildred, if you don't know how to manage them — and so are men."

"Oh, men! Why, all those I've met *are* so interesting. Only I keep thinking — it's rather conceited, I suppose — that about a lot of things I know more than they do."

Frank was somewhat stunned. Had he been warning her against the wiles of the cougar only to find her an accomplished woodsman? He found himself rejoicing in every bit of independence and self-sufficiency which he discovered in his daughter, for she had come to the place where not the most athletic father could protect her, not the richest father could buy her any sort of privilege, not the wisest father could safeguard her with counsel. She had nothing to depend on but eighteen years of parental training and the government of the United States. He asked himself, if Mildred was to be unavoidably thrown with all the other young people in the country, wasn't it important that they have the chance to be the sort of people he would be content to have her thrown with?

And yet Frank admitted that the Swede's intentions were undoubtedly honorable. There was no doubt of his being a good-looking, well-grown man probably able to provide her with food and clothing by the sweat of his brow for the rest of her natural life and so, according to his standards, quite in a position to marry. Frank realized that his daughter was getting an amount of romantic adventure which she would never have enjoyed without the Service, but he was much disquieted. If such things were happening to the million and a half girls in the Service, wouldn't the human race develop all sorts of curious crosses possibly non-advantageous?

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was growing hot — oh, very hot indeed! The air was like a dry sponge that drew every last drop of moisture out of the reluctant land, and still dry, rushed on to drain new acres. The wheat would have filled a little more if there had been rain, but full or not it was dead ripe and farmers breaking off a head here and there found the stalk crisp and hollow. The harvest had come all at once with a rush, and there was danger that the kernels would drop from the heads before the grain could be cut. The farmers watched for the government harvesters as Sister Anne watched from Blue Beard's tower, and while they waited, dragged old discarded reapers from their barns, oiled them in desperate haste and set out to save a few acres of their crops. The Agricultural recruits worked night and day — in four shifts now, for the moon was full. Extra units and extra tractors were rushed from regions that could wait, to this which was threatened. The smell of gasoline from an approaching tractor was sweeter on the wind than any breath of spring. The forces of the whole Service were focused here to save the wheat. No submarine prowling beneath a provision laden ocean could create such potential hunger as the drought did hour by hour. And the heat grew!

The sun and the flying dust burned even the most seasoned skin to brick red.

"Say, honest, if I had to sit on the back of my neck,

I'd stand up all night, so sore it is," said Mamie Epstein, smoothing a layer of cocoa butter over all visible parts of herself.

" Mildred, you're peeling again all across your nose! Why didn't you put magnesium on your face before you started? If it doesn't blow off, or sweat off, or rub off, it's some protection."

Ruth Ansel, shining under layers of cold cream, studied Mildred critically.

" It isn't that it looks bad to be burned like that — but it hurts! I hate to lie awake all night wishing I'd never had a skin."

" I believe that my eyelids are so burned that they're swelling — can you tell, Ruth? " Mildred thrust a well-greased face toward her.

" I should say they were! Don't they feel funny? "

Only Winkles took no discomfort from the sun. Acclimated to heat since before Asshur-Bani-pal sat his throne, before the temple of Bel rose by the Tigris, the skin of her race turned the sun aside like armor. She watched the other girls in wonder.

" A little sun, some wind — and all this! "

" Well, I heard a man to-day tell Mr. Fox while we were lunching on his veranda that it was lovely cyclone weather — do you think he meant there really might be one? "

" What is ' cyclone' ? " inquired Winkles.

The girls had grown used to letting Mamie Epstein answer all questions — not because she always knew, but because she had a willing mind. But in the matter of " cyclone " she failed them by being ostentatiously occupied in rubbing in cocoa butter and pretending not to hear.

" It's wind," said Ruth with a slow accuracy, " a great

deal of wind all at once. It tears up trees and blows down houses and it goes round and round."

"Oh, Ruth, I think it's a hurricane that does that — I think a cyclone goes straight ahead!"

They discussed it back and forth, while Mamie Epstein covertly drank in every word, the while slowly rubbing in cream.

"Cyclone cellars, a fellow in Kirksville said those holes with doors by the schoolhouse, were," Mamie contributed at last.

"And in the churchyards too — don't you remember?" said Mildred.

The next day opened with the same dry wind from the southwest, — a deadly insistent wind whispering into the ears of the farmers:

"What I didn't do yesterday, I'll do today! Do today — do today!"

A horrible recitative!

The Unit had finished one district and was being rushed to the next which they hoped to reach by afternoon.

As the bus mounted a little hill, a small biplane circled low and made a landing in the road ahead. There was a great cheering and a group of Service boys went whooping toward it. The officer in charge set them to push the machine out of the way of the bus and the boy who worked hardest at it was Arthur Wintermute! Arthur, without his tutor or his valet, pushing and tugging just like anybody else — Arthur carrying his shoulders with some regard to where shoulders ought to be! He explained to Mildred that it was an aviation training corps.

"They haven't let me go up alone yet, but I'm going today and if I can qualify, I'm going to join the regular flying corps in Texas when my year is through. Just think of being a flyer for the United States!"

So even Arthur Wintermute could develop ambition when real work was forced upon him!

It did change people — work did. What had it done to Nick? And as though Arthur divined what was in her mind:

"Edith writes me that Nick's been sent to the mountains to make roads to some new copper mines the government's opening up. She said he's awfully keen about it — likes working and everything! — he must be a lot different — only I'd rather fly."

Mildred was a little hurt that news about Nick must come to her so indirectly. Of course she hadn't written *very* often — but then Nick must know how busy she was with the harvest. And besides, she resented the idea of Nick's being different — she wanted him to stay just the same. But she didn't believe it anyway — How should Edith Wintermute know? Why hadn't Nick chosen aviation instead of roadmaking? It would have been so much more suitable and he'd have had a better time.

"Oh, I wish I could wait and see you go up!" Mildred called back to Arthur as the bus started on again.

The regiment to which the flying corps belonged was stationed in the next hollow. They were quite raw recruits. Later they would be sent away to the borders or the coast defenses, or perhaps to the training ships. Those who made superlative records were given a chance to enter West Point, so that the officers of our ever-changing citizen army won their positions through sheer ability.

An hour later they had reached their new barracks and the afternoon shift was ready to start for the fields when Ruth called to Quartermaster Farrington:

"What makes the sky so queer?"

They all looked up. The air was frightfully hot and

absolutely still as though a tight cap had been pinned over the edges of the world. The blue in the sky was gone. From millions of miles outside the earth the rays of the sun seemed to have changed color as by the hand of a conjurer.

"Honest, it looks like the wheat was turning green! Understand me, not like again it was young, but like it was sick. It's got me scared, all right."

They huddled about the bus watching the cold green light growing in the hot, still air. And then along the road they had come, rose a low, black wave; flat as a wall of paint, sharp and straight as a knife blade where it met the blighted sky. It hugged the ground as it swept silently toward them — hugged it close like a blanket that Earth was pulling over her parched knees.

Suddenly Annie McGee shrilled high:

"The Cyclone! The Cyclone!" and rushed for the door with the rest tumbling after.

They crowded chattering and sobbing against the windows, Annie crossing herself desperately. They saw the distant grain flattening as under the laundress' iron and then the dark wave came and struck the end of the building like the solid impact of a river in flood. The walls bent, — recovered, — there was a spatter of rain, — and the thing was gone!

But Mildred tore open the door and dragging Winkles by the arm, ran through the cold wind toward the bus, for she had seen a great struggling thing, fighting like a giant eagle, go down the wind.

"Quick, Winkles, quick! — we must catch it — there was some one in it — I saw — that is, I think there was — Quick!"

They got the bus started and turned after the cyclone. Only the finger tips of it had brushed them but they could

see the great black formless mass going on ahead. The road led in the general direction it had taken, and they crowded on every bit of speed the lumbering machine could carry and followed after. There was real green to be seen now even if the wheat lay tangled and flat — real green and the sunlight dancing over it. The world smiled a little wet, sheepish, smile as though willing to make up for its fit of temper. But Mildred and Winkles pushed the bus on, peering right and left over the country on the chance. Here they saw the tops of trees capriciously picked off as a child pulls the head off a daisy — here was a house disroofed — over by the railroad station a great gray corrugated iron grain elevator had been resolved into its component plates, as neatly as if by men trained to the job. It was a hopeless chase of course — there wasn't a chance of their finding the aëroplane — only they did!

Not more than two miles away it lay in the corner of a field, a mere pile of unrelated odds and ends of steel and canvas and wood — and, fallen clear of the wreckage, Arthur Wintermute lay upon his face.

They turned him over with trembling, unskilled hands. They thought he was breathing, but they didn't quite know — they thought his heart beat, but they couldn't make sure.

"I can run faster than you, Winkles," gasped Mildred and started for a house just in view across the field.

The farmer's family that came trailing her back found Winkles with part of one of the wrecked wings pulled loose and ready to be used as a stretcher.

"I don't think he's dead," said the farmer's wife, "but I wouldn't undertake to say for sure. Lift him gentle, William, I'll take his feet — now you girls slide that thing under him while he's up — there, that's it. Wil-

liam, you take that end — if you face the other way you can hold on better. Here, Lyman, catch hold right here. I'll run ahead and get a place ready and some hot water, —oh, and the doctor!"

"Where will I find him?" asked Mildred quickly.

"Well, I couldn't rightly say — if the wires ain't down we can use the telephone — we'd better try that anyway."

Mildred walked beside Arthur as they carried him up. It seemed to her as though he were trying to raise his eyelids and she patted his hand and spoke to him:

"Arthur — Arthur Wintermute — don't you hear me? It's Mildred — can you hear me? It's Mildred Carver." And all the time thinking how she had just been wishing Nick was in the aviation and being more tender of Arthur in gratitude that he wasn't Nick.

"I don't get any answer on the telephone — I guess some of you'll have to hitch up and go for the doctor," said the farmer's wife. And then it was seen that Winkles was driving the bus up to the door. They went for the doctor in the bus, found him and brought him back and waited in agonized silence till he had made his examination.

"Well, I can't tell just what the damage is — he seems to be hurt pretty bad but it's mostly inside. There's some ribs fractured, of course — but it don't seem likely — "

"Wouldn't it be possible to have a consultation or something if it's as bad as that? Isn't there a hospital? Can't we send for somebody?"

The country doctor looked at Mildred in slow surprise.

"Well, there isn't much of anybody near that you could get hold of — Not that I wouldn't be willing to call in a consultant, of course — it's a difficult case and if the Mayos — "

"Who are they?"

"Oh, way up in Wisconsin — that's a long way —"

"I'll wire anyway," and Mildred, leaving Winkles to help the doctor and the farmer's wife, started the bus again for the little railroad station she had seen near the wrecked grain elevator.

The wires were down! She got the name and direction of the nearest town to the east which would probably be out of the path of the cyclone and made for that. She preëmpted the wires with a young imperiousness, the consciousness of unlimited money power, and the cachet of her Service uniform — got her father in New York on the telephone and told him to explain to Mrs. Wintermute, and also his promise of a special train with the best surgeon he could find in New York, also the promise of a wire to the Mayos and to some one in Chicago or nearer if he could get them.

It didn't occur to Mildred that the Unit Quartermaster must be in some perturbation as to what had become of them, so she drove the bus back to the farmhouse and took her place with Winkles as the doctor's aide. But some time during the night an anxious Alice Farrington in a commandeered Ford appeared at the farmhouse and took her place with the watching girls.

Arthur was breathing now — harsh, heavy and slow — but his eyes were closed and he lay inert. A message came before dawn that Mrs. Wintermute had left New York and that doctors from Chicago were on their way. The night wore on and all the next day — Arthur lay with his chest rising and falling. An hour before the train with the doctors got in, his chest went curiously flat.

The tragedy made a profound impression on the busy, happy little Agricultural Unit because of the sheer personal horror of it all. But in Mildred it bred the feeling

of being very small and very helpless and very much alone! The blessed security of her childhood seemed shattered — all the years when terrible things happened only in books or in newspapers or in places that were very far away indeed, were blotted out, and death and horror had touched her. Fear, from which she had been guarded all her life, had put its finger on her. If she could only get back to the place where somebody or something stood between her and dread! She longed for her own home, her own people. She wanted to be protected and taken care of. She was suddenly homesick and frightened and alone.

And all the while the Earth smiled its little wet, green, deprecatory smile as though the wheat that lay tangled and flat were not the life of the people; as though Arthur Wintermute were still to make his first flight in the government service.

But they were quickly shifted out of the devastated region, and sent back and forth, back and forth, following the harvest trail northward as the crops ripened, for the wheat must be reaped to the last field, and they ended with a final rush of all the force that the government could muster at the northern border.

And there was the fall plowing for the winter wheat and the seeding — but not much of that for the recruits who had been called three months after Mildred were now experienced workers, and took the brunt of the fall planting.

The Forty-second Unit took its turn helping with the thrashing and loading of the wheat harvest, until the black frost came and their year was done.

CHAPTER XIX

ONLY when our ideals are made flesh and come among us do they bring crucifixions. So long as democracy remains embalmed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, can we not buy and sell as we choose? Gather our gains into banks and build high walls of privilege about ourselves? But the materialization of Democracy is no painless process.

Frank and Mary Carver waiting in the Grand Central Station to receive their daughter, found themselves part of the same crowd they had been in a year ago. If there were a few more hats where shawls had been before, — if increasing prosperity had brought more cleanliness and a look of better feeding, they did not notice it. For between these other parents and the Carvers, direct personal relation — the sacred rites of eating together, of intermarriage, of playing the same games, discussing the same people — simply did not exist. There was a chasm between them much greater than mere race could dig. The Jewish and Italian and Greek parents had much in common with the Americans and Irish from Harlem and the Bronx; all the basic problems of food and housing, of bringing up their children and providing for their old age, were theirs together. For Mr. and Mrs. Carver these problems had vanished through the possession of much money for many generations. In all that waiting group the experience of real democracy was as foreign as reincarnation. But these returning boys and girls had

gone centuries ahead of their parents in a single year for they had been part of the world's first experiment in industrial democracy.

They came fairly tumbling now from the steps of the tourist sleepers, their ruck-sacks in their hands, their thick boots thumping firmly on the platform, their shoulders set square. Being city-born and bred, they had been given their Service year in the country. The first four cars were filled with boys. There was a sudden hush in the waiting crowd as they formed in double lines —took the

"LEFT, LEFT, LEFT," from the captain and came marching up the steps — brown, hardy, young men of nineteen.

The iron gates slid open and the parents pressed against the restraining ropes that made a clear aisle to the far end of the depot. The lads came through grinning and there began to be cries of recognition.

"There's Eddie! — there, next that tall fellow on the other side. Oh, Eddie — say Ed! — Ed! Hi! — poke him, mister, will yer?"

"Oh, Abe! — Honest, Mamma, ain't that him coming along? — Say, is it your own son you don't know?"

"Now, my dear, don't cry so just because William is here. How the boy will feel to see his mother in tears! — No, I'm not crying myself! — You're quite mistaken. I'm only a little hoarse! There he is! I see him — I see him! Look, Annette! Look — No — further down — that way! No, I did *not* pinch you either! Nonsense — you're just excited. Try and keep calm! Willie — Willie — Willie!"

It was a roar as of the Chicago wheat pit that rose when the boys turned into the waiting crowd — for here were people whose emotion roused the full force of their lungs;

people who could only be glad when slapping each other on the back; people who cried and laughed together, and that forcibly; a group which manifested its feelings obviously, audibly and through the body almost as naïvely as a herd of deer. The boys were all conquering heroes even if they had done nothing but paste labels on bundles in a Government Express office, and the crowd absorbed them joyously, not realizing what potent yeast they were to the old order.

The boys had all passed before the girls came through the gates. Short and tall, fat and thin, they were drawn into likeness by their tanned faces and their uniforms. Their questioning eyes glanced left and right. Out of the democracy of their Service year they were met again with all the differences that social stratification implies. It came as a blow mixed with the joy of homecoming — they winced and were happy at once. With what pain and what sinkings of the heart did some of them again feel the parental arms!

Mrs. Carver didn't recognize Mildred at first with her brown skin and a strip of adhesive plaster over one eyebrow. And even when she had discovered her, and felt her strong young arms about her, and had lifted her shoulders away from the pressing people and taken a step toward the door, her daughter slipped away from her again. Mildred ran over to a black-browed girl, the center of an obviously non-English-speaking group whom Mrs. Carver inferred from their appearance were engaged in the business of conducting fruit stands; and then she stopped by a girl crying joyously in the arms of her policeman father; and then she was swept into a group of boys who laughed and wrung her hands and reminded her that they were all going to Coney Island next Saturday and one got her promise for the first ride in the scenic

railway, and another begged her to chute the chutes with him. And until the crowd finally disintegrated and drained away to surface cars, and elevated, and subway, Mr. and Mrs. Carver had to stand and wait.

"Who was the short, dark girl you spoke to?" Mrs. Carver inquired when they had settled into the motor.

"She's one of the two best tractor drivers in our Unit. Her name's Winkles and she came from a place you can't pronounce in Syria. We never could tell whether it was Winkles or Jimmie Cabot of Boston who got the most acres out of a gallon of gasoline. Isn't she a dear?"

"What happened to your forehead?" Mrs. Carver countered with quick tactfulness.

"Oh, that was two weeks ago. I ran into a rock, the reaper broke a blade and a belt flew off and hit me in the face. I never even saw the rock, and if I had I wouldn't have thought so small a rock would have made so big a jolt."

"Well, dear, I imagine you are as glad to get back as we are to have you. It must have been a terrible year — thank God it's over!"

"Why, Mother! It was wonderful!"

"Wonderful!"

"I'm glad to be back because I wanted so awfully to see you and Ruthie and Junior — and I wish I could do it again."

"Oh, my dear!"

The cry seemed forced from Mrs. Carver and she tried to cover it with a cough, but it had sounded nevertheless, and the girl set her face as the motor drew up at the door.

Mildred had looked for Nick in the crowd at the station — looked with a curious combination of eagerness and dread which she didn't understand. She hadn't heard from him for several weeks and wasn't quite cer-

tain where his last station was, but she had taken it for granted that he would be home to meet her. Well, probably he had decided to meet her at the house. She knew that some of the family would be there to welcome her — it was the Carver custom. Other and newer people might permit indifference, but the Carvers were a closed corporation inside which a strong family affection was deliberately fostered. But Nick did not run down the white stone steps to greet her — only Ruth and Junior came to hug her hilariously. And then she became conscious of the family phalanx inside the door. So still it seemed to her after the unrestrained emotion in the depot; so immobile, so subdued! And, yet, she knew they would not be here if they were not glad to see her, quite as glad as Mamie Epstein's cousin's husband who had lifted her from the floor and kissed her loudly on both cheeks.

Mildred saw the family group with new eyes. The women were just as delicately perfect, the men were just as straight and honorably clear-eyed; the cadence of their low voices was just as beautifully restful; their clothes were just as harmoniously superior to fashion; their ways just as kindly and considerate — they had in no way changed. But Mildred felt like a sailor suddenly set in a windless harbor after rounding the cape in a spanking breeze — there seemed nothing further to do about anything. She looked about furtively for Nick — but evidently he hadn't come, and then the family flood closed over her. Dutifully she kissed Aunt Millicent's soft old cheek.

"It is a great sacrifice to give a year of your life and I hope the government appreciated it!" said that lady with considerable condescension toward the world in general and the government in particular.

"Tell me — what did you talk with them about?"

This from a tall, shimmering sort of a cousin addicted to sparkling black clothes and educated in France!

"Why, we talked about everything, Alice — everything there is to talk about, I guess."

"Who took care of your clothes?" asked pretty Anne Weston.

Mildred twinkled into a laugh.

"We were supposed to do it for ourselves, Anne, but if you really *want* me to confess, I'll have to say that Mamie Epstein did mine most of the time."

"Mamie Epstein — who is she?"

"Oh, she's one of the girls in our Unit that I like a lot — she can sew. Everybody in her family makes clothes — her father and everybody."

"Oh — one of those garment workers!"

"Yes, Anne."

"She was probably glad to earn the money!"

"What money?"

"That you paid her for taking care of your clothes."

"Oh, Anne! I didn't *pay* her to do it! She's my *friend!* She did it for me because she saw I didn't know how. There wasn't a thing I could do for her except fill the oil cups sometimes."

Their soft voices kept up the gentlest fire of the most unanswerable questions!

"Wasn't it hard to sleep in the room with other people?"

"Did you find that the rectors of the country churches took a real interest in the young people?"

"How could you get on with uneducated persons?"

"It was probably a real privilege for the other girls to know you — you could help them in so many ways!"

Mildred was entirely out of countenance. Had she

got so far away from them in a year? Hadn't they any idea what it had all been about? That it meant anything more than a visit to the seashore? A shopping trip to buy gloves? How dull was this talk of her lovely kinswomen who acted as though everything must stay the same always! How much duller than the talk of Mamie and Winkles and Ruth!

Her mind went back to those long, rainy days in Missouri when they had to wait for the ground to dry before they could go on with the plowing — days when a flat, gray sky almost rested on a flat gray earth with only the thin gray fingers of the rain to keep them apart, — and they had thrashed out the philosophy of the ages in little, and plotted out their future in the light of it, — Ellen Forsythe, and the right of everybody to do as they chose; Ruth, and her predilection for a universe ordered like a model factory; Winkles with her baffling belief that everything was all right anyway — except in Syria.

This talk of girls! It has the perpetual freshness of successive springs in that it always paints the future. Back a few thousand years and their future was the man who would take them and if there would be food enough, and not too many beatings. And then the centuries drifting by and the girls find themselves property and the talk is of accomplishments they must acquire to enhance the price. Ages later and the first talk of rights to come, rights in their own bodies primarily and then in the ownership of their children and the spending of their money. Another gap, and the talk throws ahead to the desire to know, and the future has something in it besides love and maternity. And then the schools and colleges taken as much for granted as marriage and a home, and the professions beckoning. And then, Politics and Work to-

gether, and these girls of the Universal Service picking futures for themselves out of all that civilization offers anybody.

Mildred came back to the immediate present with a start.

"Yes, Aunt Millicent, we wore our uniforms all the time. We didn't dress for dinner, except to put on clean waists and do our hair," she said faintly.

It all seemed so still; the thick rugs swallowed the sound, and the thick curtains, and the rich dresses — the mechanics of living were smooth running and oiled to the last joint. She felt that life was picking her up to set her securely in the middle of a satin-covered cushion of down — and that she would be very small indeed and very helpless when she got there. And then she felt a strong hand clapped firmly on her shoulder, and spun round under it to meet the pleasant eyes of Winthrop.

"Hullo, Citizen Carver!" he said and held out his hand.

Mildred pressed both her brown hands tight around his and her eyes filled and her throat shut as she tried to answer. Winthrop threw a friendly arm across her shoulders, and drew her out into the hall just in time to meet Andrew Carver coming in. The old man kissed her lightly and set his glasses on his nose, the better to take her in. He had clearly in his mind the picture of the girl at the top of the long stairs — with her little, square chin and her baby mouth and her surprised, long, blue glance — that and the pretty brown boot vanishing into the motor. And now he looked square into direct fearless, blue eyes — eyes no more timid or hesitant than those of Winthrop, who still stood with his hand on her shoulder, the lips were just as full and red, but indefinably

firmer, and the square shoulders were held low and far back and the brown neck rose not like a flower stem but like the straight bole of a tree. Old Andrew, looking at her speculatively, saw as he had seen before, the lady of breeding and character, the lady of position and beauty and charm, but he was conscious of something more — exactly what, he didn't know. He thought again of those other women he had known — women quite outside the clan of Carver — oh, very much outside, indeed. He had always taken it for granted that their charm came from experience that was unthinkable in his family. And yet, here was this niece of his — straight, clean, fine, — but with the same subtle charm of wider experience. Old Andrew was a connoisseur in women and he knew charm when he saw it.

"Come back into the library — you and Winthrop — and tell me all about it!"

There was a gentle wood-fire, the faint perfume of which mingled with the scent of a plant hung thick with blue bell-like blossoms. Old Andrew picked out a straight youthful chair and the two cousins lounged on the big Davenport before the fire.

"It doesn't seem to have hurt you any, my dear."

Old Andrew looked her over carefully again from the patch above her eyebrow to her worn brown boots.

"No, decidedly not. Quite — quite the contrary, in fact."

Winthrop laughed aloud.

"Haven't I said, ever since the war, that work would be the making of us all!"

The old man turned on him sharply.

"Nephew — our family is made already — it was made a good while before you were born. And as for what work would do to our girls — neither you nor any-

body else could tell till it had been tried. Mildred is our Government Experiment station."

Winthrop laughed again; all the younger generation loved the old man for a certain carefree posture of the mind as natural to him as his accent.

"I beg your pardon, Uncle Andrew. I didn't mean to find fault with the family — it's the finest I know and the only one I've got, anyway. I only meant to say that work's good for everybody — you lose something out of life if you don't get it."

"And you lose a lot out of life if you don't get leisure, —more, I think. But, that's out of our hands now. The new things the government concerns itself with —it's no less than Socialism."

He paused, eyeing the toe of his dapper shoe appreciatively and only looked up when Winthrop asked Mildred:

"Did you have a good Quartermaster?"

Then they plunged into talk of the technical organization of the Service and the Army — a comparison and contrast and sifting and sorting of their experiences, and the girl found herself and her work taken seriously, not as a thing to be recovered from and forgotten and ignored; not as a mere adventure or a lark; but as an important part of her life, and a serious concern to everybody else. So Mildred's bruised sensibilities were soothed by these two kinsmen, who, even if they were Carvers, had had a sufficiently wide experience to rate her wonderful year at its full value, and she grew calm enough to go back to the drawingroom. But just as she was inside the door:

"My dear," whispered Mrs. Carver's sister, "what has happened to Mildred's hands? Look at those broken nails and the calluses on her fingers!"

"Don't talk about it, Emma. I'm fairly overwhelmed by the things that must be taken up. The sunburn will go, of course, but suppose there's a scar on her forehead?"

"When is Mary going to bring her out?" Mildred overheard a stately cousin inquire. "I want to give something for her before the season gets under way."

"I imagine that isn't important. You know young Van Arsdale isn't back yet and somebody intimated — Mary herself, I think — that there was already what amounted to an engagement and no special reason for delaying the marriage."

"That's quite satisfactory, I should think. We've always known the Van Arsdales."

Mildred felt herself turn pale under her tan. So this was the life already laid down for her! Well, hadn't she wanted it herself, a year ago? One of her cousins roused her.

"What are working people like to live with?"

Mildred, looking up, caught the eye of Wicks, late of the Forestry Service, now engaged in handing salad, and laughed nervously.

"Exactly like us, Cousin Edmund," she said.

But when she had said it she knew she was wrong. They were not in the least like her kinsfolk, these young people who had experienced the practical working of democracy. Her family represented not the survival of the fittest but the survival of the preferred. Wasn't there a phrase "preferred stock?" Well, the Carvers were preferred stock. She looked at her older cousins who had gone ahead of her on the social path — who had passed from the debutante stage to that of young matrons, borne their modest quota of children and were pursuing the life ordained to the Carver women. She looked at her mother and her aunts who were at the zenith

of a Carver career — marrying off their sons and daughters suitably, ordering their household perfectly, entertaining distinguished guests in a distinguished fashion. occasionally sitting on charitable boards or furthering not too radical reforms. She thought of Nick — dear Nick, who would be coming back soon, expecting to marry her; Nick, who belonged to this old world of hers and would expect her to belong to it too, and she felt as though a terrible thing were coming nearer, something that would close over her and shut out the air, that would bind her hands and feet and lay an intolerable burden on her shoulders, and unless she had some relief, she knew she would scream. Suddenly she turned to her father:

"Father, you know about steel — isn't there some way of making the saw-edged blades on reapers harder than they are? I had a dreadful time breaking them in Dakota. Isn't there something harder to make them of?"

Frank turned in his chair and faced her.

"I think there is — or rather that there is going to be. Would you care to go to the laboratory and look at it?"

"Oh, father — when?"

"To-morrow, if you like."

"But, Frank," protested Mary, "Mildred hasn't anything to wear. I want to get her some clothes to-morrow."

"Oh, I can wear my uniform!"

There was instant silence in the room. They all recognized the beginning of the struggle.

CHAPTER XX

MARY CARVER caught at her daughter's life with quick hands. She had no intention of permitting any further interference with the career so definitely appointed by Providence for her daughter. Was not the Service past and the time of pleasures at hand? So she took her young agriculturist to dressmakers and shoemakers and hatmakers and corset makers and all the other makers of successful debutantes. Mildred revelled in clothes for things that she had almost forgotten could happen, — gowns to dance in, and dine in, and go to the theater in, and eat at restaurants in, and drive in, and walk in; and hats and wraps and shoes and gloves and veils and fans and furs to go with them and all the other lovelinesses that money and taste can provide for a young American princess. It was a matter for time and effort, for racking thought and anxious consideration, for fittings and drapings and measurings — and for failures and disappointments as well as successes. Henriette manicured and hairdressed and experimented with creams, the dressmakers circled around the hems of Mildred's skirts on their knees, their mouths full of pins, milliners bent and rebent the brims of her hats. Physically it was easy enough to groom her for her part; mentally it was not so easy. For just at that very year when it had been the Carver habit to take the awakening mind of the young and set it in stays and circumvent it, and balk its explorations and gropings

and joyous adventures, and smother it with outward activities, the Service had thrown the gates wide. Somehow Mary Carver felt that she must blot out the Service year.

"You must remember that that's all past now, daughter," she said one day.

But Mildred answered, "It's never going to be past, mother. I couldn't get away from it if I tried."

Mary Carver cursed — in the terms allowed on the lips of perfect ladies — the day when the democratic theories of her ancestors began to clothe themselves in industrial forms and claim recognition even in the best society, for Nick had not come back and, worst of all, Mildred didn't seem to care.

But the preparations for Mildred's coming out went briskly on; dresses were finished, dates set, visiting lists revised and invitations sent. Mary had not much doubt about Mildred's social success because she was beautiful and people — particularly men — liked her.

Old Andrew reassured and frightened her at the same time.

"One of the most charming girls I ever saw, Mary, but not the kind of girl we've had before! The men are going to like her," and then after a pause, "All kinds of men, Mary. What are you doing to do with her after you bring her out?"

"Why, marry her, Uncle Andrew."

"And then what?"

"Oh, the usual thing, I suppose!"

"Mary, don't you see that there isn't going to be any usual thing about your daughter? The time is past when marriage is the only career for a lady, my dear. Even the daughters of princes keep shops. This new business of the Service opens more doors than we knew existed.

Can't you agree with your daughter that there are several things she might do with her life? Is it true, something somebody said to me, about Henry Van Arsdale's boy and Mildred?"

Old Andrew could be as direct as Mamie Epstein when he chose.

"They wanted to be engaged before they went into the Service."

"I suppose you and Frank wouldn't let them?"

"Well, Uncle Andrew, they were so young!"

"Where's the boy?"

"Nick isn't back yet — at least we haven't seen him."

"I expect, Mary, that you're going to have a great deal of trouble if you try and bring that match on now, if the boy's as much changed as she is. Unless he's changed in just the same way, there won't be any use trying."

"I'm going to try it, Uncle Andrew — just the same. It's a perfect match and exactly what I want for her."

"You think, my dear Mary, that these girls are all concerned with marriage and men. Well, you're wrong. This never was true, in the purely physical sense we're afraid to put into cold words. They have been intensely interested, and almost exclusively interested in marriage because it was the most attractive career open to them — not because of the men they must marry to achieve it. Now that they've the choice of so many things to do, marriage loses its monopoly. It's only one of many careers. When they're older it is different; the preoccupation with men comes later."

So Mary Carver was greatly disturbed for she knew that Old Andrew was a psychological barometer, and more and more she wished that Nick would come back.

Mrs. Carver was not the only person distressed at Nick's absence. Henry Van Arsdale, having received

instead of his son a letter from him saying that Nick felt he had no right to go home while the Nation needed so many new roads in Arizona in order to move the copper from the mines to where the country needed it, was much disconcerted. Hadn't the boy done what the government wanted him to for a whole year? What more did he think he ought to do? There were phrases that puzzled him in his son's letter — "The right to good roads" — "my patriotic obligations" (did the boy think he was a soldier then?) "Answering the call for transportation," "Being an inland marine for Uncle Sam," "Helping out the people's railroads" — what did the boy think he was, then — a public servant? A member of the Civil Service? Didn't he realize that he'd done his duty already? That he'd finished his Service Year and that the country had no further claim on him? Why didn't the boy come home! There wasn't any hint of how long he wanted to stay or what his plans were.

Henry Van Arsdale, looking around his library, was conscious of a sudden distaste for his surroundings. The low oak bookcases which filled in the spaces between the windows and doors struck him as particularly unattractive. The small bronzes and carved ivories and bits of porcelain set on top of them seemed particularly ill chosen. His cigar, just lighted, had a rank flavor, and he tossed it into the fireplace. Even his great padded chair was uncomfortable, and he rose sharply from it and strode about the room. The deep springs of feeling carefully lidded down by his breeding were welling dangerously near the top. He wanted his son back, and he was deeply hurt that after a year's almost uninterrupted absence, the boy should choose to potter about in the Southwest.

But although Nick did not come back the winter hurried forward and the day came when Mildred, tall and

rather splendid, stood beside her mother as the guests came in. The brown edge of her tanned neck was still plain above her white gown and the string of tiny pearls that had been her grandmother's. There wasn't anything of the timid bud about this girl who had drawn straight furrows over half the Mississippi Valley! The Carvers had never before presented a young farm hand as a débutante. Mary Carver, standing beside her dignified, self-possessed young citizen, felt as though she were perpetrating a joke on society.

To Mildred it didn't seem a joke but a delectable dissipation — a bubbly draught that went to her head and left her uncritical. For all these important people had put on their loveliest clothes and their brightest jewels just to welcome her — Mildred Carver! They had sent her flowers, till the whole house was laden with conflicting perfumes. For her the orchestra was playing; for her the rows of motors blocked Washington Square; for her delicate food was set on flower laden tables — for her — for her!

And she sparkled and dimpled under her brown skin, and laughed in a little quick ascending scale, and so blossomed in the sun of favor that her eyes shone with a kind and tender gayety, and her rich lips parted in a frank and generous smile and the same indefinable charm that had drawn John Barton from the flour mill and the Swedish farmhand out of the sunset, encircled her now and men and women stopped to watch.

Mr. Apperson Forbes backed into the vantage ground of a window and eyed her intently. Andrew Carver, seeing him looking at Mildred, settled his glasses on his nose and watched him shift his position again and again when incoming guests shut off his view of the young girl — saw his under lip thrust itself forward and his eyes

narrow, and then when the music from the ball room swelled more insistently and the younger people began to drift toward it, saw him shake the kinks out of his long thin legs and lead Mildred toward the dancing. Old Andrew sighed.

"Almost anything is better than the usual thing — sometimes!" he said to his own memory.

That night — or rather that morning before dawn — Mildred lay high against her pillows living the evening through again. The wine of excitement had died out a little, but still there was the feel of the soft scented rush of the ball, like colored lights on a quick stream with just a few things to be remembered, — a lady slender and elderly, the very greatest lady in the very greatest family in all New York, holding her hand for a moment and then bending forward with a sudden impulse to kiss her lightly on the cheek and whisper with real emotion in her tired, handsome eyes:

"My dear — I wish I were in your place!"

Her Uncle Andrew, bringing her flowers himself in the old fashioned way, and presenting them as he might have offered them to a reigning sovereign, flowers that she insisted on holding, though the fashion of that had passed. Mr. Van Arsdale, lured from his books and his club to pay his respects to the girl who might have been his daughter-in-law — but with no word of Nick. It seemed to Mildred that Mr. Van Arsdale had made a very special effort to be nice to her and that he had not been altogether at ease. And then came the picture of Apperson Forbes making his plea for a dance, her mother's quick nod of acquiescence. His thin, elderly arm had guided her faultlessly to the music — her first dance at her first ball! As she thought of it now, there had not been a great many

young men for her to dance with — not nearly as many as there had been at the school-girl dances when she was sixteen. She speculated about it there in the warm dark — some of them were in college, of course, and a good many of those she knew had gone straight into business after they finished their Service Year. And then those who were as old as Winthrop and David — those who had gone to France — so many didn't come back! She remembered that she had danced with several married men, and men almost as old as her father, that night. Now, when they had danced in the barracks, there had been plenty of men. And she considered with rising resentment that her mother hadn't asked any of her Service friends — not even Ruth Ansel whose people she knew!

And then what she had tried to drive below the surface of her mind all the evening — the fact that Nick wasn't there and hadn't even taken the trouble to send her word — came to the top of her consciousness. Nick had apparently forgotten that he had asked her to marry him — they were to have insisted on being engaged as soon as their year was over! And to have been married almost right away! He either didn't care for her any more, or thought the matter of no consequence, or perhaps had found a girl he cared for more. And Mildred found that the dregs of the wine of excitement were bitter in the mouth when she slid down under blankets and tried to go to sleep.

Her mother and father were talking in their sitting room — Mary Carver's hair, almost as long and as golden as her daughter's, had been brushed and coiled for the night, her tired feet were in the softest of slippers and she was sitting forward, her chin set into the bowl of her two hands, looking anxiously into the fire.

"Well, Mary, what is it?" Frank asked her at last.

"It's everything!"

"Why, it seemed a good enough party — as parties go — was anything wrong?"

"Frank Carver, I don't believe that you really looked at the party from Mildred's standpoint at all — you just thought it must be all right because the people came and enjoyed themselves and it was all so pretty to look at. You didn't see the awfulness of it!"

"Why, no — what do you mean?"

"Well, you know — everybody knows, — that there's just one reason for bringing a girl out and that's to get her married. We may pretend about it, but we know that's what it's for!"

Frank wound his watch slowly and laid it on the table.

"I suppose that is it — though I hate to admit it even to myself."

"I don't! We want her to marry, so why not say so? And we want her to marry the right sort of a man, so why not see that she meets him?"

"I'm not as honest as you, Mary. I'd rather not put it into words when it concerns my own daughter."

"I realize your limitations, my dear, — but whether we shall say it or not, isn't the point. What I'm blue about, is that there was hardly a man here to-night I'd consider letting her marry."

Frank swung round from the fireplace.

"What!"

"I mean it — hardly one! Just think it over yourself — there were the two Townsends, about the right age and of course they're the right kind of people — but Tom's as solemn as one of those gray cranes we saw on the Gulf — life would be very dull with him — and the youngest has been obviously in love with Minnie Martin

for six years and it begins to look like the sort of grande passion that's almost extinct. And there were those two from the British Embassy — England isn't very bad of course, but it isn't New York — there were a few others, but when you come right down to it, they were a rather left over lot. Why, do you know who took her to the ball room for the first dance? Apperson Forbes!"

"Oh, I say!"

"Yes, he did!"

"It wasn't so bad as that in the Service — those men I saw there were at least young and strong — not desiccated remains, — residual legatees of another generation!"

"Oh, why isn't Nick Van Arsdale back! Then we'd arrange that marriage right away and she'd forget all about this foreman and the Swede and that terrible Service!"

"She'll forget the men anyway, I think — but how about the work?"

"Oh, Frank, as though work was a thing anybody liked to do!"

But Frank Carver, remembering the rapt face of his daughter above the wheels of the reaping machine, was not so sure.

CHAPTER XXI

IT was true that Henry Van Arsdale was offering a tacit apology for Nick's absence by his presence at Mildred's débutante dance. He was bewildered and distressed by the situation. What was this boy up to? That Nick was high strung and excitable his father knew, — what if he had got into some scrape and was afraid to tell him about it! Well, suppose he had, wasn't it the part of a wise parent to let him fight through it alone? Did it not make for strength of character? But Henry Van Arsdale could not comfort himself with this thought. A picture of all the things that could possibly happen to Nick began to keep him awake nights, began to steal in through the curtains of his bedroom and lie in wait for him in the corners of his library, and intrench themselves under the dining room table. He might have some crazy idea of prospecting a mine for himself — silly thing to do when he didn't need the money! There was a lot of political filibustering and half-baked revolution still going back and forth across the Mexican border; perhaps he was playing D'Artagnan to some intrigue, — that would appeal to his sense of adventure. It might be that he had a touch of malaria or something like that! But anyway the fact that Mildred had made her début ought to have brought him home. Henry Van Arsdale dropped his book — that might be the trouble! The boy might have fallen in love — it had been a long time since he had seen Mildred! He had

heard that those Mexican girls were as lovely as Spanish señoritas!

In Henry Van Arsdale the need for action, — immediate physical action, — had almost entirely lapsed. His impulses were mostly born into an unreal world where they died without even the intent of fulfillment. But this danger to his son upheaved the rock strata of his habits.

"I wish," he said to Arnold, who answered his bell, "that you would have them pack a bag for me, and get a check cashed, and will you see when the next train goes West and make arrangements for me to go on it?"

"Thank you, sir. Yes, sir. I am afraid that the bank is closed for the day, sir, and I shall have to get the money out of your safe."

"Fix it any way you like, Arnold, only tell them to hurry everything."

And so Henry Van Arsdale, a little tremulous from his nervous tumult, found himself on a slow train crawling into Arizona. The people about him made up part of his distaste for his position. They were thin, and colorless, as though the hot sun had bleached them out instead of ripening something fine and rich within. They were ill-shaped and carried themselves lumberingly. Their shoes in particular, — and he looked appreciatively at his own custom made boots — were very trying to the æsthetic eye. The women, he thought resentfully, were the type that should have been in sunbonnets, but were not.

When he turned from the people to the dry desert about him, he was still more unhappy. It was so desolate, so inhuman! The dry land billowed away from the railroad tracks in ill-shaped, ragged waves that seemed to beat on the low lines of red rock against the horizon. Instead of trees, tall gray cactuses stood about the desert

as though some prehistoric pile driver had driven them in. The only color was in the little spots of green about some settler's cabin, or near some infrequent spring. This unmitigated barrenness was what his son had preferred to New York — what was the strong tie that held him?

Nicholas Van Arsdale, assistant foreman in a government road-making gang working in Arizona, was thoroughly enjoying his job. The work of reshaping the earth to the uses of man; of blasting and digging and fitting and grading and topping and dragging till the mountain side was ready for burden of wheels, seemed to him a great act of creation. And the sense of his duty as a citizen which had been born during his year in the Universal Service was satisfied also, for he could see how the road he was helping to build would make it easier for the Secretary of Mines to get out the copper. Day by day the time drew near when the tiny mine tractors would drag their trains of cars up the grade. Nick felt his heart pound at the thought of the first load of copper that would come down over *his* road.

But though the work itself was satisfying the life he had to lead was dreary enough. He wondered why anything so indispensable to the welfare of the race as copper should hide away below the surface of the desert where nobody he cared about lived; where Mildred Carver in particular could not possibly be expected to make her home. For his mind was full of Mildred these days —Mildred on the other side of a tennis net, Mildred with her shoulder against his in the little gray racer, Mildred on the veranda, that wonderful night when the silver, perfume-laden mist came up the valley, and Mildred going away with his ring on her finger. It wasn't possible to bring Mildred to a place like this — to have her live in the cheap little hotels in the mining towns or to camp

about from place to place as the road progressed. She wasn't the kind of girl that would fit into such a casual existence — it wouldn't be right to ask her. Why, she's just "come out!" Her time was probably filled with dances and receptions and theaters and lots of fellows would be wanting to marry her. Nick kicked viciously at a particularly rich piece of copper-bearing rock as he thought about it. He wouldn't have any right to marry her and make her unhappy; and he couldn't let himself be a slacker and go back on his job, — not as a citizen in a real democracy he couldn't! No! There was nothing for him but work — that was a man's job.

And just as he had settled the matter for the thousandth time came his father from New York. The afternoon sun was glaring brazenly on the bare, unshaded street; on the square, cheap railroad hotel with the despondent flower boxes pulled back into the protecting shade of the shallow veranda; on the two churches fronting each other belligerently across the street; on the stores with their limp awnings; on the abandoned offices of the old mining company; and on the rows of miners' cabins straggling up the sides of the canyon on stilts, dreary, flimsy, absolutely stereotyped living places baking in the sun, as Henry Van Arsdale greeted his son. What a place his boy had chosen to live in!

After they had dined on the stereotyped, standardized food which the remote hotels of the United States keep continually on hand, they found places for themselves on the hotel veranda beside the drooping plants. It had been ninety in the shade most of the day and the street had been empty; but now with the drop of the sun the desert was losing its heat and a little cold wind came up from nowhere and blew upon them.

The slow, shuffling steps of the Mexican and Spanish

miners sounded in the dark street and they would suddenly emerge into the glare of the arc light as though a curtain had been lifted from before them. The high laughter of the women who greeted them jarred out of the darkness, there was the occasional clatter of a cheap automobile and the quick pattering footsteps of the little burros as a pack train came back from the mountains. But over and through these sounds, which were much the same as those which had filled the evenings in that region ever since copper was first mined there, came the young, fresh laughter of the boys in the Universal Service. From them came bursts of song, usually exaggeratedly sentimental in intent but inharmoniously matter of fact in rendering. They scurried in and out of the picture show, and bought the little drug store out of ice cream; they skylarked about the streets and engaged in wrestling matches on the pavement. The Mexican miners watched them in uncomprehending stolidity. Why should not all one's leisure be spent in the sensible pursuit of resting?

It was easy enough to start Nick talking about roads and how to make them and where they ought to go — easy to get him to talk about the town which he had explored carefully — easy to get him to talk about the desert which he found wonderful and entrancing in spite of its barrenness. Henry Van Arsdale quieted his minor fears which related to mining, malaria and sporadic revolution almost at once. But the question of the possible inamorata hadn't been broached.

A bold-eyed girl stole cautiously to the veranda and peered over at them smiling. Nick turned his shoulder with a shrug of distaste.

"Do you know any of the people who live in the town?" his father asked diplomatically.

"I know the new road contractor. And there's the

night clerk in the hotel, he's a college man, came from Chicago. I've talked with the two mining engineers who are working for the company — oh, yes, I know several people who live here."

"I mean don't you know any men who have homes here? Any people with families? Any women, — or girls?"

The smiling girl stole furtively past again.

"That's about the only kind of women there are here, sir," and his lips curling with distaste for this particular characteristic of a mining town.

"I don't understand exactly what you want to stay out here any longer for, Nick. It seems to me that you've gone into this business of making roads a good deal, why not study something else? I'd like to have you home again, and Mildred is back."

Nick got up and walked to the edge of the veranda — his hands in his pockets.

"I know she's back — but — I don't want to go home. I'd rather stay here."

"But Mildred must be expecting you. Have you written her that you are delayed?"

"No, sir."

"You ought to, Nick. She will wonder what has happened."

Nick braced himself against the veranda rail.

"I don't pretend to misunderstand you, sir. I suppose you think I ought to go back and ask Mildred again, but I just can't see it. I was an entirely different person a year ago and I don't think she would like me now as she did then, only she might not know I was different and marry me anyway."

"How do you mean you are 'different'?"

"Well, there are such a lot of things I want to do.

When I went away I just thought that there was college, and I would go to that; then there was all the world to travel about it, and I would travel about in it; then there was Mildred, and I thought we would keep on doing together just the same sort of things that we had both been doing all our lives."

"But what do you want to do now?"

"I want to make roads. Why, father, there's a man who was head of our gang up in Iowa told me that he thought the day of railroads was past. That it wasn't enough to lay steel rails just in a few places over the surface of the earth and have just a few railroad trains. He said, and I don't see any reason why he isn't right, that you can build a kind of railroad train that will run on any road that is good enough for an automobile. He said, and I don't see why it isn't true, that a farmer way up in the edge of Dakota should be able to load his own wheat crop right on his own farm and then take the car down the regular road if it was the right kind of road and have it attached to a train and carried on till it is hitched on to a longer train and goes on down to the mills where it is made into flour. He says that we would make over the whole world if we had the proper kind of roads everywhere, — government and education and almost everything — and I don't see why he isn't right. They would tie all the people of the United States together, and all the people of the world together, if there were enough of them, and they were good enough. It seems to me that it's my job to help put these roads through."

Henry Van Arsdale smiled a little sadly. So many people had thought they had turned a new leaf in the book of democracy! He remembered the white-haired gentleman who believed that the parcels post was the opening of

a new door for all the race to pass through, and who proceeding on that belief, had actually forced his idea upon a reluctant Congress and got that one definite bit of public service done. He remembered another enthusiast who felt that the problems of housing the multitudes of the great cities was the most acute the world needed to solve, and gave his heart's blood for measures that he thought would bring lower rents, lower buildings, more sunlight and air and better places to live in. And then there was that great group who felt that the Single Tax on land was the doorbell to the millennium, and others who thought the problem of universal happiness would be solved by Socialism, and still other groups who thought it would be solved by Bolshevism. And here was this son of his, with the seer's light in his eyes feeling that it would be solved by good roads!

Henry Van Arsdale felt himself very old as he looked at his boy. Who was he to stand between him and his chance of usefulness? And then came the old code of the gentleman bred into his race for many generations.

"Nick," he said, "this is all very well, but there is your very definite personal duty. You have asked a girl to marry you, and it is up to you as a gentleman to go through with it."

"Father," said the boy, "I don't think it is. I think it is up to me, as a man, and incidentally a gentleman too, not to lure her into a marriage where she would not be happy."

"Well, it is up to you, my son, to make her happy after you have married her."

"Do you think, father, that to make a woman happy is the whole duty of man?"

"I am not sure that it isn't, Nick. At least you could be in a worse business than making Mildred Carver

happy." Henry Van Arsdale was tired, he couldn't pursue the conflict with his son that first night, so he let the subject drop.

The next day he went with Nick over a trail to a newly opened mine. The company wanted to make the trail into the kind of a road over which they could bring the ore down to the smelter without laying a track. Nick showed him where the road would have to lift on the outside as it turned a sharp curve, and where the grade would have to be cut to just the proper number of feet to the mile, and how to prevent washouts in the spring and freezing and cracking of the roadbed in the winter. It was a new kind of interest for Henry Van Arsdale, and he got just a little of Nick's enthusiasm for this job.

But again after dinner they sat on the veranda and again Henry Van Arsdale tried to make his son see his duty through his father's eyes, and again he failed utterly.

"It's like this, father. Suppose I went back to New York and married Mildred. And then suppose I had to be traveling about building roads, first in one place and then in another. Would I leave Mildred in New York by herself, or would I keep her out here winter and summer, living in a tent with nobody to talk to but the road gangs and nothing to do but watch the same thing being done over and over again. No, sir, it isn't any way to treat a girl."

"Well, Nick, of course there is the other alternative. You might go back and live in New York."

"Father, it wouldn't be right! It's my duty as a citizen to go on with my work just as though I were in the army. I *am* in the army just as much as if I were fighting in the trenches. The Service Year was just a beginning — the real thing keeps on all your life. I want to marry Mildred more than ever, but you wouldn't want

me to be a slacker in order to make her happy, would you?"

Henry Van Arsdale regarded his son with a mixture of exasperation and pride. It warmed the very lining of his heart to realize how thoroughly the lad meant what he said, and yet —

"Do I understand you to say, Nick, that you absolutely refuse to stand by your word and marry Mildred?"

"I wish you wouldn't put it that way, sir, it sounds like a thoroughly caddish thing."

"It *is* a thoroughly caddish thing. There is no other word for it."

"No, it isn't, only I can't make you see it, sir."

Another day Henry Van Arsdale stayed in the town, another evening he sat on the veranda and plead with his son.

"Undoubtedly it won't be long before Mildred marries some one else," he said finally.

Nick jumped to his feet.

"No," he protested, "Oh no!"

"Of course she will — why shouldn't she?"

"She doesn't *have* to marry! We've got past that!"

The older man shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, we don't have to discuss it, anyway. It's you are making it quite definitely not your affair."

Nick turned from him in silent resentment.

"What I hope," the elder man continued cautiously, "is that she doesn't make any horrible matrimonial blunder — get herself into a tragedy."

"I don't see why you think there's any such probability!"

"Perhaps there isn't — perhaps not. I imagine there won't be any lack of applicants!"

"Don't, father!"

"Why not?"

"I can't stand thinking of her marrying anybody else!"

"There isn't any doubt you'll have to!"

The next day Henry Van Arsdale started east again feeling that a barrier had grown up between him and his son which could never be broken down; a barrier not of age or conduct, but of the different ideals which this new life had brought to the surface, and he was filled with a bitter resentment that anything should come between him and this boy who was the only person he really loved in the world. To him it seemed that the high places of chivalry and honor and truth were laid low, and that all the finer things that had been bred into his line through the generations had been swept away in a murky stream. There was a great deal of anger at Nick in this feeling too. If he had been a feudal baron he would have cut the boy off with a shilling. But what would have been the good of that in a modern society? What would he do with his shillings when he came to die? And besides Nick had money enough of his own. So there was the long journey back through the stifling desert with the dry gray cactus rising like daytime ghosts to overpower him. There was the long companionship of the dull, washed-out people who filled the slow trains.

But as the train dallied along through the dust, Henry Van Arsdale began to get a new picture of his son. He had always felt Nick's brilliance and a certain dogged quality which might make that brilliance count for a good deal. The boy might do some gallant piece of exploration — might chart the inchoate region of Hudson Bay or follow up the lost riverbeds of Thibet. He had always recognized a quality of adventure in his boy that might lead him to aëro racing or to toy revolutions in South America. But now — ! Had he been mistaken

in Nick all these years? Blind to the big practical side of him? And the idealist side? And the unselfishness? It began to grow in his mind that what he had to deal with was not a Service boy, but a changed civilization. Nick had been inducted into a new age and had left the codes and standards of his father as far in the past as the decrees of Amenhotep. Henry Van Arsdale felt the growing pains of a new respect for the ideas of this later world as the train hurried him back to his home — empty without his son.

CHAPTER XXII

THE obligations and engagements of a débutante closed like waves of the incoming tide over Mildred. There is no question that she enjoyed herself. But the social diet palled surprisingly soon. It palled also for most of that year's flowering of débutantes, and the mothers, who were in the main uncomprehending, had much difficulty in keeping their daughters in hand. More marriages than usual took place across the social line, and they were less cried out upon than formerly because the supply of eligible husbands inside was so patently inadequate. But Mildred didn't formulate her rebellion, even to herself, till Mamie Epstein put into words her own envious longings.

It was a Sunday afternoon and Mildred had brought the big car to take Mamie out riding. The chauffeur, under the guiding intelligence of Wicks — his twin as to sombre braid-trimmed uniform — had found the way down the Bowery, across on Rivington Street, not unused to the sight of limousines searching out the Settlements, and south on Orchard Street where the social life of the Ghetto drifted back and forth on the sidewalks. It was cold for New York — but Yiddish-e-fraus sat at the doorways of the dingy tenements, wrapped in crocheted capes above knitted sweaters, their tired feet resting wide apart and multitudinous skirts draping down into the vast laps that had held many children. The week-day dikes of push carts were gone from the curb and the tide of children played back and forth from street to sidewalk, so

that the motor had to bray its way slowly among them. The young girls, quite unbelievably smart in their hard earned clothes and with the wonderful eyes of the Orient looking out into Occidental streets, strolled back and forth by twos and threes casting long glances at the groups of young men smoking their cigarettes and lounging at the corners. It was the great democratic drawing room on the day when the New York Ghetto was "at home."

Wicks after one glance at the doorway where they stopped, overstepped the bounds of his duty and followed his young mistress silently up the stairs, leaving the chauffeur unassisted to repel boarding parties.

Mamie was ready and waiting — in fact she had spent the last hour hanging out of the window in company with all the Epstein family who were not doing scout duty up and down Orchard Street. When the door opened Mamie stood out against a gay background of bright figured wall paper, large patterned rug, flamboyant sofa cushions and gilt framed pictures, in new and startling simplicity, a plain serge dress and a plain, dark hat and an imitation but modest lace collar and plain black shoes. This much sartorial wisdom Mamie had gained since she and Mildred found themselves side by side in the troop train. Her complexion, however, had taken on all its old elaborate frankness.

As they went down the stairs Mildred was conscious of doors carefully pulled ajar and bright, dark eyes watching them curiously, and Wicks following in his livery found the doors opening wider yet as he passed and a little extra flutter and craning of necks after him as the special visible hall mark of the wealth and position that was passing through their building.

Quite an obstruction had been formed in Orchard Street by the crowd gathered around the low bodied, high

powered car with its liveried chauffeur who looked resentfully at the returning Wicks. Is it any part of the duty of a high salaried automobile engineer to wrestle personally with the young of the proletariat?

"Get right in, Mamie. Wicks, is the heater under Miss Epstein's feet?"

The dark fur spread over their knees, the door slammed, the crowd of children became vocal.

"Oh, say Mamie. I know you — oh, say, gimme a ride —"

"I guess I know her better'n you do — ain't Izzie Epstein in my room by the school? Ain't he?"

Their grimy fingers caught at the mud guards, their feet tried to stay on the running board as the car began to move. As a great moose might shake free from harrying wolves, the sleek automobile freed itself from the children and felt its way around into Rivington Street.

Mamie balked her impulse to catch at the gleaming handle of the door as the car at last finished its slow threading of the crowded quarters and turned swiftly up Fifth Avenue.

"Lean back, Mamie, you'll be more comfortable."

"Say, Mildred — this is something grand! Just like being in Heaven it must be to go riding in automobiles every day."

"I do like riding, Mamie — only I like to run the car myself — I can almost think it's the tractor again when I do."

"You should worry with two men in grand suits always to run it for you!"

"But I *like* to do it — you didn't do much tractor driving so you don't know what fun it is to feel the machine do what you tell it to."

"Well, all that's inside them tractors I cleaned it every

day — it ain't so much fun that I should be getting homesick if somebody else does it a while now."

They were sliding along up Fifth Avenue and Mamie's quick glance swept from the window displays of the smart shops to the Greek temples of the money changers — back to the towering cathedral, and then settled happily as they came abreast of the great houses.

"Any of them you could stop and see the people in! Now you got an introduction to society — ain't it so?"

"Oh, no, Mamie — I don't even know the names of ever so many people living along here! Tell me, Mamie, just what is it you do at the Shirt Waist factory? Do you sew them or cut them or what?"

"Oh, I'm an operator — I'm shop chairlady now."

Mamie's voice was indifferent as though she didn't wish consciously to make the everyday part of life too vivid in this moment of exaltation.

"That's splendid, Mamie — let me congratulate you! I suppose a shop chairlady is like a foreman, isn't it? Like Mr. Barton?"

"Well, not so you would notice it! Say, ain't that the house Mr. Astor lives in? I seen it in the paper."

"Yes — that's the house. But, Mamie, what does 'operator' mean? What do you operate?"

"Oh, it's sewing on the power machines — rows of stitching with six needles like your gang of plows, I'm doing now. Ain't that Mrs. West's house that gave the dance there was a princess to last Thursday?"

"Yes, that's where Mrs. West lives."

"Were you to it?"

"The dance? For a little while I was — there was a crowd."

"Honest, did you see her?"

"See who?"

"Why, the princess."

"Yes, I'd seen her before."

"What's she look like?"

"Why, she's rather tall and very thin — and her eyes are so big and black that you don't notice much else about her. She dances beautifully. I think she isn't very young. That must be wonderful, Mamie — to sew with six needles at once! I had such an awful time just sewing with one! And to make shirtwaists that everybody needs so, — it's serving the country to make them! Isn't it exciting to do it?"

"Exciting? Say, it's something fierce it's that dull! All day the same thing over and over it is. *You* gotta do something different all the time from your breakfast till the next day — *you* get the excitement, Mildred."

"Oh, no, Mamie — it isn't exciting — it's just the same thing over and over — it isn't nearly as interesting as being in the Service."

"I can tell you, Mildred, when I got a automobile like you got, and a house to live in like you got, and a mamma with real pearls like you got, working by the machine I wouldn't want I should ever do it again!"

The motor was stopped in the fifties by the cross town traffic and Apperson Forbes sauntering slowly south in the formal afternoon dress of the perfect gentleman stepped to the curb beside it. His glance at Mildred was as warm and encircling as he could well make it — his glance at Mamie in spite of the deferential bow under the raised hat was extremely chill.

"I was just going down to Washington Square to beg your mother for a cup of tea."

"I think she's at home," Mildred told him with mischievous simplicity.

"But I've changed my plan."

"Oh have you — when?"

"Since seeing you going the other way."

Mildred felt herself blushing not so much at what he said and the evident intention of his look, as at having Mamie a witness to it. But Mamie was silent until the car began nosing itself into the curving ways of Central Park.

"And beaus rich like millionaires even if they ain't so young!"

There was no use repudiating Mamie's inference for Mildred knew that it was true. She turned again to the thing that oppressed her.

"I wish I were working at something — I wish I were doing anything that anybody needed to have done as you are. I feel guilty all the time — a traitor or something like that. When there are such a lot of things that people need to have done and me doing nothing at all. When you make a shirtwaist you know that some one is going to wear it. And it's so dull, Mamie! You may think I am an idiot to say so, but when I remember that work with the Unit — especially when we were in the flour mill — and how there was always something interesting and different to do all day long, and people that you liked to talk to, and who could tell you things you didn't know — why I almost cry I'm so homesick!"

"Well, Mildred Carver, it's ashamed to say it you should be, with everything just like it was heaven somebody told you about! It's if you was working by shirtwaists you should worry."

"Oh, Mamie, it's finding every day just like the day before and not doing anything that anybody needs and not having anything to interest you and nobody to talk to who knows about what you like — it's those things that are so awful!"

" Honest, Mildred, you make me mad. With not having to get up in the mornings — and clothes like every day was New Year's — going to dances by grand gentlemen friends in automobiles every night — If you would be working by machine operating all day and only dances when the Shirtwaist Union gives a Annual Grand Ball, and Banquet in Avenue A Casino — you could say thinking of the Service it makes you lonesome! And the grand young man, to come by you in the railroad station when at Christmas time we came back — and kissing you like getting engaged — and just as easy you could marry him! Ain't it so!"

" Mamie — you're entirely mistaken. I'm not engaged to Nick Van Arsdale. I'm not — and I'm not going to be! I don't even know where he is! I don't want to know!"

" Just friends you can be if you want to, — but such a grand young man — "

" Please, Mamie, let's not talk about it — see, isn't that a battleship anchored in the river?"

They had slid through the Park by now, following its swinging curves without a break and over to the river edge. The girls leaned forward watching a tiny launch leave the companion ladder and turn toward shore.

" Perhaps they are Service boys coming ashore — I can't see their uniforms from here — can you?"

" Not so good. A cousin I got in the navy somewhere. Last month he went in the Service. 'Mamie,' he says, 'not to working by cloaks and suits do I come back again!'"

" I've a cousin in the navy too — he gave his yacht to the government during the war and then he liked it so much that he enlisted in the navy and stayed right along. He's a captain now. They might be in the same ship."

They sped up Riverside Drive, the river below now veiled thinly by the bare branches of trees, now showing clear for miles to the north till the last worn down rounded billows of the palisades cut it off. The crisp wind brought a brighter color than Mamie's to Mildred's cheeks. And as the sun began to sink and transmute the river into gold, they turned and went back through the Sunday afternoon quiet of the middle class respectable quarters — back through the desert silence of the business district, back among the ever crowding, ever noisy, ever ailing children of poor food and darkness and bad air — back to Orchard Street and Mamie's home.

"Never did I think in an automobile I should ride up Fifth Avenue. Every day I would think how great a pleasure it would be."

"Mamie — it isn't so much fun every day. It's like operating the machine."

It was a week later that Mildred lunched with Ruth Ansel. Ruth's mother was out and the little maid brought in the little lunch and set it before the two girls in the tiny sun-lit dining room of the apartment overlooking Columbia University.

"Do you like it, Ruth — the scientific management you're studying?" Mildred asked wistfully.

"Oh, I love it! It's like making a great machine out of people, or doing an experiment in physics that's got to turn out according to the law — if you only know the law! It's this way: you take a machine that cuts off pieces of iron — "

And Ruth launched into a careful description of the joys of scientific management as far as she'd got with it. It was good picturing — clear, restrained, thoughtful; her father, the professor of science, would have been gratified, even proud to hear her — but Mildred's attention

slipped gradually away and though she continued to regard her hostess with polite attention, still there was no spontaneity nor lift in her response. Ruth was a little slow in the uptake, as was natural to one trained in the creed that knowledge for its own sake would inevitably awaken interest, but at last she stopped short, considered Mildred critically, and asked:

"What's the matter?"

Mildred looked up with a start.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Ruth — I seem to be dreadfully stupid to-day — I didn't get much sleep last night; that dance at the Eltons' didn't begin till almost midnight — and I — "

Her voice trailed off into silence.

Ruth considered her soberly as though she were an impersonal problem to be solved, and then melting into a rather rare tenderness put her hand over Mildred's on the table edge.

"What is it, Mildred?"

Mildred started to draw her hand away in defense of her reserve, and then breaking a little, turned it palm up to meet Ruth's.

"I guess there's nothing the matter but me — I guess it's because I'm a fool and inadequate and everything. But it just seems to me that I can't *stand* it, not to do anything that's worth doing or that anybody needs to have me do! I like to go to dances and the theater and dinners and things — only I don't like to do it all the time. There are just about the same people at everything, too, and they're all so much alike and they say the same things — Now in the Service everybody was a good deal different from everybody else — it was quite exciting every day doing work that was important like helping to grow crops."

It was a very long and self-revealing speech for Mildred Carver to make.

"I suppose they want you to marry somebody," Ruth said quite impersonally.

"That's the way everybody acts, though of course they don't say so." Mildred was quite as impersonal as Ruth, but she felt her color rise. If Mamie had seen Nick kiss her at Christmas, Ruth might well have seen it too. And here was this awful humiliation that he didn't seem to care anything about her. She couldn't let Ruth know that.

"Well, why don't you?"

"It's so awful to have that the only thing expected of me — and there's no one I want to marry anyway, — too old, or too dull or something. I don't see why I should marry just to get out of the way!"

"I don't either, Mildred. I wouldn't stand it if I were you."

"What would you do?"

There was a little mist in Mildred's blue eyes.

"I'd tell them I wouldn't marry till I wanted to — and nobody could make me."

"Well, Ruth, what good would that do? Everything would go right along just the same."

"Don't let it!"

"It's all very well to say 'don't let it' but what can I *do?*"

"You might go out and get a job. Go to work doing something that's important. Pretend that your father hasn't got all that money and do as almost everybody else has to do — go to work!"

Mildred looked at her wide-eyed, her lips a little apart.

"How could I find something to do?" she asked breathlessly.

This was a facer for them both — at last Ruth ventured:

"You might go to an employment agency."

"I suppose I might!" Mildred felt a little catch in her throat at the possibility, and then:

"It would be pretty awful for mother!"

"Well of course if you're going to be sentimental about it you'll just let yourself be married to somebody you don't care anything about and then you'll be like all the prehistoric women that never did anything with their lives. Your cousin David says that all the women in your family always do what is expected of them anyway — he says you — "

"David Carver?"

"Yes — I — I've — he's been here several times since I met him at your Christmas party — I — Well, Mildred, you've got to break away from it all and *be* something. Come and study scientific management with me — it's perfectly *fascinating!* And you'd be surprised how important it is."

"Oh, Ruth, I don't care anything about scientific management! That wouldn't help at all. It isn't just to find something to do — I've got things to do all day and all night, now."

"But Mildred, something useful — "

"I know — that's perfectly all right — but I want something that interests *me* — something I *want* to *do* — to have done! And useful besides!"

"Well, what do you want to do?"

"I don't know — exactly. I'd have it so that everybody in the world can have all they want to eat I guess — to help raise things or grind them or something to do with them anyway — I don't want always to drive a tractor or always to work in a flour mill of course — but *something* I'm interested in."

"Well, Mildred, you're a perfect fool not to do it — a perfect fool! You haven't got to stand it at all. It's *your* life you're living, not your father's or mother's. It's your own work you've got to do! Just go right out and *do* it. Nobody can stop you!"

It appeared to Mildred as she thought over what Ruth had said, that there wasn't any real reason why she couldn't do as she liked, shouldn't at least try the kind of life that she wanted to live. Nobody could stop her, of course. Ruth had said to her that there was no use *being* rich, and popular and a débutante, if you were just in prison all the time. Ruth thought she was missing all her chances — standing it like this. And besides, what right had she not to do her share just as though she were a soldier?

"What's the use of having everything if it doesn't do you any good?" she had asked. "It's awfully corking to learn something you want to know, the way I'm doing, and you know yourself what it's like to work — and you can't do any of it! Why, if I was as rich as your people are, I'd work all I wanted to! I'd go where I liked and talk with whoever I chose — I think sometimes rich people are perfect fools."

Mildred sitting quiescent while Henriette coiled her light hair with the elaborate simplicity appropriate for the débutante; standing dully while the maid slipped the filmy folds of her gown over her shoulders so that she might dine with people she didn't care for, and go afterward to a musical comedy in which she hadn't the least interest, kept repeating to herself Ruth's words:

"Sometimes rich people are perfect fools!"

At the dinner, Apperson Forbes sat beside her, watching her out of his heavy lidded eyes and flatteringly monopolizing her attention. He made this monopoly

tantamount to extreme devotion, and carefully, subtly, he displayed the goods he had to offer.

"I'm running down to New Orleans for the races next week — got a colt entered for the handicap. I'd like to have you see him start. Do you think your mother would come down in my car? We could ask a pleasant party — the youngest Townsend and Minnie Martin, and Van Dorn's back — got his divorce last week — and there's that young English actor, Whitehall, — clever fellow — lots of amusing stories. And perhaps Alice DuVal, just to give it snap — if Mrs. Carver doesn't object."

Mildred felt herself flush. It sounded so amusing, so different from the rather subdued gayety countenanced in the breaking in of the young women of the Carvers. That kind of thing had a forbidden charm, she wanted to see what it was like, the possibility excited her, but she answered soberly enough:

"I'm afraid we've got a pretty full week. I know mother is giving two dinners, and there's the Junior League play, I'm to have a part in. But wouldn't it be fun if we could go!"

"It would be — fun — if you could come — without having to consider other people in any way."

The remark was half a question but Mildred was already deft enough not to take notice of that fact.

Apperson Forbes changed the basis of his attack. He was in no sense a bird-like person to flit from bough to bough — he was simply in command of many avenues of approach.

"I was in Tiffany's the other day — they've got some new things made by this Frenchman that's gone in for jewelry — Dunois, isn't it? — showed me some of those pale blue sapphires set into a collar with yellow diamonds. Rather splendid thing. Be just right on you — blue and

gold. I thought I'd buy it — would have bought it if there'd been any chance of it's being worn."

His intent eyes, trying to look straight into Mildred's and being shut out by the protecting droop of her lashes, fixed themselves on the rose white of her young shoulders.

Now there is a great difference between being financially able to buy jewels and actually buying them. Mildred's ornaments were the simplest that a young girl with all the command of wealth tempered by taste could expect. Her mother's jewels were rich and sedate. But this collar sounded like barbaric splendor, like a revolt against limitations, and being in a state of general revolt anyway, it drew her.

"It must be wonderful!" she exclaimed.

"If you'd drop in there — to-morrow perhaps? — I'd like to have them show it to you — of course if you happened to like it — "

There was another tentative pause as his sentence died without an ending. And all through the dinner, and at the theater afterward when he drew his chair close behind hers in the box, there was the persistent suggestion of the kind of amusement which would be more exciting than the stereotyped social life of the débutante which was obviously palling upon her. And Mildred, rising a little to the talk, as to something easier to fill her life with than the study of scientific management or working in a factory, and not involving any heart-breaking conflict with her family, dimpled and blushed and laughed in her little rising scale, and found the comedy not so dull as it might have been, and took just a little scared enjoyment in the thinly veiled vulgarity of it, and came home to lie high against her pillows with a half determination to take this way of spicing the flattening flavor of life. Nobody

expected her to do anything but amuse herself. Nobody even thought about her working for the country because she was a citizen as Mr. Barton was working in the flour mill. It was perfectly evident that Nick didn't care about her. She hadn't had a letter from him for two months and then only the most impersonal sort of a one about nothing in particular. She took her thoughts from Nick and put them back on Apperson Forbes, and race horses, and people who were said to be very good fun but whom some folks would rather not meet; and startling jeweled collars. And then drifting to the man himself and those long slender hands, and long narrow eyes. Suppose it had been he out on the veranda at Torexo last year! Suppose *his* arms had gone round her, and *his* lips had met hers — and —

She slid down from her pillows and pulled the coverlet over her head as though she were afraid.

CHAPTER XXIII

"I WISH," said Mildred at breakfast one morning, "that I had something to do!" Frank looked over the top of his paper; Mary stopped with an unopened letter in her hand; Wicks standing immovable beside the sideboard jumped.

"I thought I heard somebody complaining recently that she never had any time to herself."

"Oh, Father — that isn't what I mean. I mean work."

"I should think, dear, you'd find what you're doing a good deal like work — it takes all day and most of the night."

"I know it does, Mother, and it doesn't amount to anything when it's done."

"What," said Frank, slowly, "do you want to do, daughter?"

"I don't know, Father — not exactly — Ruth Ansel is going to be scientific manager and help people run their mills; and Mamie Epstein is in a shirtwaist factory and they've made her shop chairlady; but I don't want to be either of those things — I don't think I could."

"But, my dear, the conditions are so different! Mamie Epstein has of course to earn her living — and I suppose that Professor Ansel wouldn't be able to provide his daughter with an adequate income either."

"Oh, Mother, I don't want to work because I want money — I want to work because I like it — it interests *me, and* because the government needs me to help."

Mary Carver pointed out to her dissatisfied daughter how impractical her idea was. Would it not make it utterly impossible for her to go on with the things she was doing now? And would any sane girl give up these things?

Mildred listened in the silence of a slow forming determination. After all, nobody could make her keep on with it, just because of money! She didn't have to spend her life doing nothing when she knew she ought to work. She *wouldn't* be a fool in the sight of Ruth Ansel or anybody else!

And so she began surreptitiously to knock at the doors of industry. She didn't know just how to go about it. The advertisements "Help Wanted — Female" in the papers were mostly for nursemaids or stenographers or some one to do specialized work that she didn't understand. Besides the advertisements seemed to be for girls who were obliged to think first about earning money — not about doing something that needed to be done. She had followed up one or two wrong leads — a sample clerk, — work in a doctor's office which proved to be opening the door and dusting the table, — an indefinite job in Harlem which materialized into taking tickets at a moving picture show. All these discoveries she made without letting any one know. If the chauffeur and Wicks wondered at the strange addresses to which they drove their young mistress, no gossip from them ever crept above stairs. And then she advertised, carefully modeling her advertisement on those in the papers and got nothing but offers of work as a clerk or an office girl or a "learner" in millinery. And she wanted to really make something — to create! — to do work that was public service. After two discouraging weeks she discovered the Public Employment Agency.

"I haven't," said Mildred to the woman at the desk, "ever worked before except when I was in the Service," and she held out her "honorable discharge" card.

"I see — you made a good record — but it's agriculture. Not much help to you in New York City. Here's this time in the flour mill though — did you like that? We might get you a place in a factory."

The woman began to look hastily through a card catalogue, and Mildred had a quick vision of Mamie Epstein working "by ladies' waists."

"Not in a factory where they make clothes, if you please — I'd rather not sew."

"Well, I don't blame you — I hate it myself — only there's more girls in that than anything else in the city, and since the Service takes so many out, they're always short handed." She dipped into another file. "How'd you like human hair or paper box making? I could place you in either of them."

"I — I — will you tell me what I'd be expected to do?"

"You'd make switches and wigs and all sorts of fake hair — here's a place in Sixth Avenue wants a beginner — they pay five a week to start. It's a pretty good place, I guess, we haven't had any complaints from it anyway."

"I think perhaps the box making — "

The woman filled in two blanks with addresses and pushed them toward her. "Try 'em both," she said finally, "I tell you what it is though, — you're a nice clean looking girl and I think you'd learn easy enough. If you want a place as waitress or chambermaid in a private family you can get better wages than anywhere else — if you want to do it."

Mildred gasped a little and felt herself flushing.

"I think I'll go and see the other places — thank you."

"*Well if* you don't get either of these come back and

I'll see if there isn't something else. I'm sure we can place you."

Mildred gave the address to Wicks as he opened the door of the limousine for her. It turned out to be on Sixth Avenue not a mile from her home in Washington Square. She climbed two flights before she came to the office. The boss, a squat man in shirt sleeves, took her slip and seemed glad to see her.

"Ever done hair?" he asked her.

Mildred was tempted to say that she didn't even do her own.

"Well, it's bad you ain't had the experience but I think we take you as a learner. You can come up to the work room and I'll make you acquainted with the forelady."

He preceded her through the door and up two flights of dirty, narrow stairs.

"Miss Cavello!—Say, Miss Cavello!" he called at the door of a low ceilinged, dim room. A thin, worn woman who looked like an Italian came from the far end.

"Here's a new hand I've brought you, Miss Cavello,—she's green yet but she looks bright. Whadde ye say to putting her on the rolls?"

"There ain't no place in there. I gottanough. I'm short of weft girls. Only it ain't so easy."

"Well, give her a tryout."

The forelady looked Mildred over critically.

"You can come and see the work," she said and led her to a little low garret. The roof sloped over the windows, which were small and caked with dirt. Above each of the forty girls who sat on either side of the long tables was a green shaded gas jet. The gas seemed to have been leaking and the room was heavy with the smell, but the windows and doors were tight shut lest the long hanks

of hair should be blown about the room. The forelady showed Mildred a seat at the far end of the room before a wooden frame with string stretched along the top. On the table was a hank of brown hair held in place by a large red brick. Miss Cavello showed Mildred how to bunch a few of the hairs and knot them into the string close together until a fringe was formed.

"When you get a yard done you give it to the 'finishers' up by the door — see?"

Mildred looked at the brown hair before her with unspeakable distaste.

She was trembling and a little sick as she came down the long stairs to the office. It was probably important that people who needed them had wigs — consider Aunt Millicent! — it might even be a public service to help make them but Mildred couldn't feel that it was her duty.

"You can come tomorrow," the boss said as she reentered the office, "you get five dollars a week to start. If you make good I give you more when you get learned."

"That's very nice of you," she stammered, "but I think I had better not try it — it isn't exactly what I was looking for. But I'm ever so much obliged."

"Say, whadde you think you can get? I pay my help good! You get steady work and you make good money when you get on wigs. If you work hard maybe I give you $5.50 after only one week!"

"Thank you very much, but I think I won't do it."

"You think you get a better job. Well, that's where you make the grand mistake! When you change your mind you come back and I take you on."

The box factory where she went next turned out to be a rickety old red brick building in the tangle of Greenwich Village. The entrance was flanked by waiting trucks, *so the* chauffeur was forced to stop some distance away

and Mildred walked to the door. A man in shirtsleeves took her slip, looked her over carelessly — one blue serge suit is very much like another blue serge suit to the uninitiated.

"Ever worked at boxes?" he asked briefly.

"No, I never have."

"Finished your Service year?"

"Yes, I was through in October."

"What you been working at since then?"

"I haven't been working at all."

"All right — I guess we can take you on in the pasting; five-fifty to start. Report Monday morning. Eight sharp."

And then calling toward the back of the room:

"Hey! Jim! Got those invoices ready? Well, bring 'em here, can't you?"

There seemed nothing further for Mildred to do but to go out through the door, past the trucks, and into the limousine again. She took her seat trembling a little — she had a job! She was going to work! "Monday morning at eight sharp." It was quite necessary to have paper boxes. It was a useful work because there had to be something to put things into. Though of course it wasn't so important as growing things to eat. She looked up suddenly to find herself still in front of the box factory with Wicks standing expectant.

"Oh, I beg your pardon — I forgot! Home please!" and then suddenly on the impulse: "Wicks, I've got a job."

The footman started, then smiled slowly up to his gay eyes:

"Thank you, miss, — I hope you like it. I thought you'd be doing something after the Service."

And touching his cap, he sprang up beside the chauffeur.

Mildred thought of it exultantly as Henriette coiled her hair afresh and brought her a gold and white dinner dress, for it was the night of Mrs. Carver's weekly dinner.

"The decorations, Mademoiselle Mildred, are of yellow. Orchids the most wonderful from the gardener at Torexo! This white with the gold, if Mademoiselle pleases, will give the effect."

"Oh, thank you, Henriette — it's quite all right — it's very clever of you to have thought of it."

After dinner, Apperson Forbes settled himself beside Mildred at the coffee table. Mrs. Carver didn't understand just why she asked him so frequently — perhaps because he was so obviously glad to come. And then he was an amusing companion. People seemed glad to find themselves beside him. He watched the girl's strong, slender hands filling the cups from the silver urn in silence for a while — he knew how to make a silence count toward what he was going to say.

"Do you know what I always think of when I see you at this coffee table — and I come to watch you as often as Mrs. Carver will ask me?"

"It must be monotonous if you always think the same thing."

During the moment before he answered, she thought that her remark was unexpectedly clever and was pleased with her own finesse.

"Not if it's the thing I want to think of all the time."

Quick recovery on Mildred's part and right about face.

"Well, I don't like to think the same thing over again and again. I've just decided to do something different."

Waiting for his reply she felt reintrenched behind her indeterminate declaration.

"What have you decided to do — marry?"

There was an uncontrollable change in his voice.

"Oh, not that — I'm going to work!"

The man settled himself into the relaxation of relief.

"Oh, well, if you want to see what it's like, but I should think the Universal Service would have given you enough already. I never find you with time to spare for me."

"But all this doesn't count and the Service was just a beginning. I'm going to really work on something necessary and be paid for it — five dollars and a half a week."

"My dear girl, what are you going to do?"

There had been no considering pause before the question.

"I've got a job in a paper box factory — in the pasting department. The boss told me to begin Monday at eight sharp."

The man was silent, trying to recover his conversational poise. He began two quite unrelated sentences and stopped them both.

"Why are you doing this — will you tell me please?" he said at last.

"I just can't *stand* everything being so dull! Nothing happens that's different from anything else, — nothing! And besides, such a lot of things need to have somebody do them! And I feel as though I were cheating to be doing nothing all the time."

The coffee was all poured now and the room was full of soft talk. Apperson looked hastily about. There was no seclusion so he boldly trusted in the privacy of the crowd.

"Things don't *have* to be dull! They don't have to be always the same. I could put more variety into your life than you know there is in the world. You're right about too much of this sort of thing getting on the nerves. But why have too much of it. Mildred, let me show you how

much amusement there really is in life if you know how to get it. You know I adore you. Marry me and let me give you the real good time you ought to have. Mildred — darling — if you knew how I worship you!"

The girl rose straight out of her low seat and Apperson Forbes rose with her, almost forgetful of the people about him — almost forgetful of himself. She turned a little unsteadily and walked toward the library, then as a sound of light laughter stopped her, retraced her steps and sat down at the table again, face to face with the question she had settled so many times!

No one seemed to have noticed them, but some one had. Old Andrew Carver who had dropped in after dinner, pattered across to the table.

"Well, my dear, you're a niece for an uncle to be proud of. Have you coffee there for me?"

"Oh, Uncle Andrew — Uncle Andrew!" the emotion was clear in her voice. "But I thought you didn't drink coffee at night?"

"It depends on the provocation," the old man pulled a light chair forward and crossed his immaculate trousers, so perfect that it seemed impossible for anything so human as legs to be inside them. "How do, Forbes. That your horse won the Steeplechase? Yes — yes — thought so! Sounds like a good race. I don't go myself but I keep 'em in mind a little."

"Uncle Andrew," Mildred began breathlessly, "I've just been telling Mr. Forbes that I'm going to work — in a factory — making paper boxes!"

"Well, that's interesting. When do you start?"

"They told me to come Monday morning at eight sharp."

His matter of fact tone relieved the tension.

Old Andrew stirred his coffee absently.

"It's a new thing to me — thinking of a niece of mine as going out into the world and working for wages. I have to get adjusted to it. But then I've spent all my life getting adjusted to one thing after another. It's the way things go now, that all our girls and boys should work, and as for me I don't see why not. We seem to be getting ready to try out democracy a little further and I'm inclined to believe it's a good thing. But why a box factory in particular, my dear? Have you an affinity for boxes?"

"Of course, I don't care any more about boxes than lots of other things. I just happened to get a job there, and boxes are useful things — people do have to have them."

"Personally I see no inspiration in boxes. But some of these people who can get enthused over anything might teach me better. How did you find this opening of a career? I'm sure Mr. Forbes won't mind if we go into this a little further. He'll excuse a certain family interest."

So Mildred told him of her search for work, and how the things most people did seemed only valuable to her because they could earn money that way. And how "human hair" and domestic service and moving picture tickets and other things hadn't appealed to her as what she wanted to do. Old Andrew, watching Apperson Forbes as he listened, hoped that the box factory at eight sharp was enough of a barrier.

CHAPTER XXIV

MILDRED at "eight sharp" found herself confronted with an intricate combination of belts and rods and sliding knives and levers not in the least resembling either the machinery of the flour mill or the internal workings of a farm tractor, From the other side of this machine a pale, blond girl of not more than sixteen began to feed a seemingly endless strip of thick gray paper in between two rollers. She threw back a lever and out toward Mildred moved a succession of little tack boxes — freshly pasted and all done except that the flaps at the bottom were not dovetailed together.

"What do I do with them?" Mildred screamed above the sound of the machine to the pale girl opposite.

The girl stopped the machine with a jerk.

"Ain't you ever done ends?" she asked scornfully.

The foreman came and showed her how to dovetail together the ends of the boxes and then patting her on the shoulder told her to "go ahead, dearie!"

The young girl watched her impatiently as she fitted the first boxes slowly together. "Say, get a move on — I gotta get busy."

When Mildred had got the pile in front of her somewhat reduced the girl started the lever and the little boxes began to move toward her again. Mildred did not find it difficult work after she got the knack of it. There was plenty of light and air and she didn't seriously ob-

ject to the smell of the glue. The stool on which she sat was the proper height and there was a rest for her feet. But the speed and continuity with which the machine emitted tack boxes was incredible! Box after box in a stream that she could not dam they moved toward her — box after box! box after box! They would pile up before her and by a spurt of speed she would catch up a little on them. But the moment she relaxed, they began to accumulate again. There was no getting ahead and having a moment of leisure for the machine could no more be hurried than it could be retarded — steadily, relentlessly for eight hours a day it turned out tack boxes of exactly the same size and color and at exactly the same rate — and for eight hours a day Mildred Carver sat dovetailing the bottoms of them!

After the first day she brought her lunch as the other girls did for the half hour allowed them was not long enough for her to go home and back.

"Oh gee," said the pale child opposite Mildred, pulling down the lever and throwing up her arms as the noon whistle blew, "Gee, don't I wish it was Saturday instead of Monday!"

"Why?" asked Mildred innocently.

"Why? Wouldn't I have my work done and my pay coming to me? Ain't I got all the work between now and Saturday to do yet before I get it?"

"But don't you want to work?"

"You bettcha life I do! — I gotta hold my job until they take me into the Universal Service cause the old man's on the drunk most of the time."

They were eating their lunches now, all the girls in the factory standing and sitting about in a little space outside the washroom. Such meagre little lunches, most of them seemed to Mildred, and so unappetizing!

"Say, was you in the Service?" asked another young girl of Mildred — "You look like you might of been — that old!"

"I finished last October."

There was silence among the girls.

"What did you work at?" A tired, middle-aged woman had asked the question.

"I worked in Agriculture — on farms you know."

A dark Italian turned to a staring companion and translated, and Mildred quite unthinking joined in their talk. She flushed when she saw the others staring.

"You don't look like a Guinney," commented her companion on the machine.

"I'm an American — only I learned Italian when I was little."

There were a number of these immigrant girls who had come to America when they were just past the draft age; about a third of the workers were girls between sixteen and eighteen — sure to be drafted; the others were older women who had been more than eighteen when the Universal Service was established. All of them looked on Mildred with considerable wonder. Why should a girl who had been in the Service go into box making?

"Well, why would you be makin' boxes, then?" an elderly Irish woman answered her query. "You that's had the grand chance getting a starut on a real job! There ain't nothin' to it! I been pasting boxes twenty years — there ain't a girl in the trade's quicker at it — an' where am I now? Just ready to paste boxes for twenty years more if I got the strenth! Would I be doin' that if I had a chanst to hold down a grand job in the Service?"

"But people *need* boxes — things have to be put into something!" objected Mildred.

"Do they now! Well if makin' boxes is that cruel hard on them that makes 'em, ain't it up to somebody to find somethin' else to put things into? There's the dom whistle again! I gotta start putting them miles of paper sthrips over the tops av them thousand boxes! And do I get enough out av it to dress dacent and lay by something for me funeral? Oi do not!"

This was the nearest to a philosophy of work that the box factory yielded, — the idea that if the work of making anything was "cruel hard" on the workers, then it was "up to somebody" to find a substitute. This was discouraging to Mildred! Here she had gone to work because she thought it was her duty to help make something that people had to have — and now she had discovered that in the particular thing she had chosen it was more important to find out either how to make it a good thing for girls to work in, — or how to do away with box-making altogether. Just folding in the bottoms of tack boxes for eight hours a day wasn't helping much.

One noon when she and her machine partner had gone into the street for a breath of air they found themselves walking just ahead of another of the young girls whose arm Mr. Jake Fisher was affectionately holding as they strolled back and forth.

"Oh gee," said the child giggling, "don't I wish I could believe you but I ain't got the noive!"

"It's just like I tell you, dearie. You ain't gotta keep on workin' if you drather not — see? Leave it to me!"

And when they had turned at the corner and were passing again, the man said:

"An' there ain't goin' to be no jobs in box makin' much longer anyway. I been talkin' with a feller's got a new process. You take the stuff paper's made of while it's soft and sort of pour it out into a mold that's the right

shape, — cover and all,— and when it gets dry it's a box. There ain't no cutting, nor pasting, nor folding left for anybody to do. So if you don't quit your job like I'm asking you to, it's going to quit you — see? Only keep it dark."

So here was the solution of this part of the problem anyway — the whole of this "cruel hard" work was to be done away with. There would be things to put things in without her doing anything about it, and no public service in her keeping on. So at the end of the week Mr. Jake Fisher received a carefully written note with the number at Washington Square North engraved at the top.

"My dear Mr. Fisher:

"I have decided to resign my position in the pasting department of your box making factory. I think I should prefer to do some work which is really necessary. It was very kind of you to give me the position and I hope my leaving will not inconvenience you.

"Very sincerely,

"MILDRED CARVER.

"Saturday the tenth."

Jake Fisher carried the letter over to the dirty window and reread it.

"Well, whadde ye think of that! What's the game anyway?" he ejaculated. "And she was getting five fifty a week, too!"

CHAPTER XXV

MILDRED felt herself caught again in the trap. Here were cards for teas, and invitations to dinner, and to dances; and theaters to go to and lovely music to hear and beautiful pictures to see, and costly clothes to wear — all the sweets of life but no bread! Balanced against them was the making of tack boxes, or human hair or some other occupation which she could not see as a public service but only as a means of earning money. How was she going to give her country the service due from a loyal citizen? How was she going to help in some work essential to the nation? The sense of frustration grew; and the temptation to stop trying and go in for the things she knew she could have,— perpetual, hectic amusement, — and Apperson Forbes! — almost overwhelmed her.

And then one day when she was particularly blue, came Waddell, still, swift, dignified in his obsequious serving, to say that a Mr. Barton wished to see Miss Carver. The gentleman had no card. Was Miss Carver in?

Mrs. Carver was quite uncomprehending until Mildred reminded her softly:

"She is in, Waddell," she answered after an irresolute pause.

Following her mother down to the drawing room Mildred was conscious that her heart was riding so high in her breast as to interfere with the processes of respiration. She had had occasional letters from John Barton — carefully written letters telling about the work in the

mill and its relation to the great work of feeding the country — letters which were a distinct compliment to her intelligence but which had evidently been produced with considerable effort, rather than dashed off as spontaneous ebullitions of emotion. They were, from the standpoint of the high school, almost literary. There had not been anything of real love-making in them, but he had said repeatedly that he would be in New York, and there was in her a growing sensitiveness to emotional atmospheric pressure, which revealed the unsaid.

John Barton was seated serenely in the drawing room looking out upon bare, brown Washington Square. It is doubtful if the quiet curtains, the dim Persian rugs, the graceful old furniture seemed so magnificent to him as crimson plush, satin damask and more gilt. At the soft click of the curtain rings, he rose, his face shining, — only to have it fall ludicrously at the sight of Mrs. Carver. He hadn't asked for her! He had never called on a married woman in his life — there must have been a mistake! But Mildred followed her mother before he could fall into the error of trying to explain.

The call was evidently not satisfactory to John Barton, and Mildred in a French gown looked quite a different person from Mildred in a khaki uniform. Neither did Mary Carver, though irreproachably courteous, conduce to his conversational ease. But after a few moments he gathered his determination together and asked Mildred to go walking with him just as though they were in some little New England town. Had he come all the way from Minnesota to talk with Mildred's mother? And the girl, reverting suddenly to the unconventional independence of the Service, forgetting that she was a society bud, almost forgetting that she had a mother, jumped up delightedly and ran for her coat and hat.

Mrs. Carver felt herself helpless. Obviously Mildred was no longer a carefully guarded American Princess, unceremoniously approached by a member of the proletariat, but a humble private being honored by the notice of a superior officer. It was a revival of the part of her daughter's life in which she had no authority, no responsibility.

"Haven't you a park somewhere? Central Park or some name like that?" John Barton asked when they had turned up Fifth Avenue.

"It's ever so far up," Mildred objected.

"Isn't there a way to ride there?"

They took a bus, lumbering like a green buffalo and sat shoulder to shoulder on the top of it. Mildred tried to interest him in the famous thoroughfare but he had never been so near her before and couldn't fix his attention on anything but her personal loveliness. To him, the trim coat, the exquisite little hat, the rich furs, appealed not in terms of elegance or cost, but as part of the girl's beauty.

And when they reached the Park and had followed one of its curving walks into the seclusion of mid-afternoon, broken only by children and nurse maids, John Barton spoke quite suddenly and with awkward sincerity. There was no pretence of altruism in it, no attempt to make it anything but his wish as a man for her as his wife. But to Mildred the romance of the work of giving bread to the nation still hung around him; he personified the greatest experience of her life; he seemed to stand on a little hill and hold out to her her chance of service and patriotism. She did not think of her parents or Apperson Forbes. She did not even think of Nick Van Arsdale. She did not think of John Barton as a man, but as a very big, very impersonal force that would make all the rest of her life a service of citizenship. And trembling she reached out both her hands.

"And so I told him that I would be very proud and very glad to be his wife."

Mildred had come back to the house alone and found her father and mother in the library. Something told her that it would be best for her to tell them what she had done before John Barton came to ask them quite formally in the morning. And now as she looked into their stricken faces she knew she had been wise.

It came into her mind as she stood there, how much better Nick had told them a similar story — now so long ago. She faltered and stopped as she remembered it, and then went resolutely on.

Mary and Frank didn't dare look at each other when she had done. They hardly dared speak. The silence didn't break in a storm; that was not the Carver reaction in emergencies. There was rather a tangible heaving and resettling of the basis of thought. And even then they didn't say much, so great was their fear of saying the wrong thing — the irrevocable thing. They had had their warnings, but their class security had kept them blind; neither of them had been able to take the menace seriously. Now the thing they thought impossible had happened. Still it was a question of gentle argument, of reasons and persuasions and tenderness.

"Are you sure that you love him, Mildred?" her mother had asked sadly and got the counter question:

"How could I help it?"

Mary Carver thanked God that she and Frank had an engagement that evening. She felt that she must get a chance to talk with him alone and lay down a plan of campaign.

"Very slowly, Ellis," she said as she entered the limousine — and after the door was shut: "Frank — *Frank* — what are we going to do?"

"I — I don't know, Mary — but we've got to do something — we can't very well let it go on."

"Oh, that such a thing should happen to us! I was sorry enough when Francis' boy married that little school teacher from Montana — and when the Nortons' eldest girl married that Frenchman, who wasn't anything in the world but a traveling salesman, even if he was a count. But those are nothing compared to this — a workman, Frank! A foreman in a mill!"

"It's pretty bad, my dear. We've got to stop it somehow, for all I think he's a fine fellow."

"A fine fellow — to try and entrap a girl like that?"

"Oh, Mary, I don't think there's any entrapping about it. He quite evidently didn't know anything about us when I saw him in Minneapolis. Don't you remember that I told you he asked what my job was?"

"I don't believe it, Frank — besides now that he's been here!"

"Well — there's the fact that he's never been in New York before. To live in a red brick house in a block without any grounds wouldn't betoken riches to a man in whose home town every one but the very poorest had grass and a garden."

"Oh, Frank, he *must* know!"

"I think not. But if he does we're in a much more difficult position than if he doesn't — we've one weapon the less."

The chauffeur at last set them down at the house of Mrs. Agatha Porter, which as everybody knows is a very old house on upper Fifth Avenue where most of the houses are new. Mrs. Porter is a great lady — so great that she need not consider such things as social lines or levels. So very great that even the intellectuals come to

her, and the great artists and writers and actors; and the little ones too, when they can get a chance, never turn up their hungry little noses and call her bourgeoise. So great, indeed, that even labor leaders and socialists and anarchists who are not at all philosophical, and all sorts of other real people never even try to look down upon her, but come quite humbly to the wonderful parties that have made her famous in that new aristocracy which has been slowly circling the globe since the old one, based merely on descent and position and money, went down under the terrible blows of the war. And a thin trickle of the culture of the Orient that is seeping into the newer world eddies into this great house; and little yellow men with a sense of humor quite different from ours; and brown indefinite gentlemen from the Levant with wit like a serpent's tooth; and tall dark people from the high castes of free India with no sense of humor at all — are to be met in this hospitably democratic and rigidly exclusive house, famous now, wherever the new basis of social intercourse is establishing itself.

Tonight there was to be music — such music as is not to be had for the asking or for money, but only for love. They were met at the door of the drawing room by the wonderful little great lady whose creation this special manifestation of Democracy is. Agatha Porter's gray hair was piled high in the latest mode, her clothes were lovely and smart as of one who gives herself the luxury of following the fashions; her eyes were full of the beautiful sincerity and generous sweetness that transforms her guests into their super-selves by some magic of the moment, so that the train of people who come and go in her house are always a little better than their best through her, and thereby happy and anxious to come again. Even Mary and Frank felt themselves lightened of their trouble

as they took Agatha Porter's hand and passed into her drawing room.

And there just inside the door where he could pursue his favorite occupation of watching people and their ways — and most particularly Mrs. Porter and all her little looks and gestures, stood Andrew Carver. No one of Mrs. Porter's gatherings but Old Andrew held much the same place; and he had held it since out of the tragedy of the great war, this new social order began to rise. For there were those who said that even Old Andrew was a little better than his best in that house, and that if he had found his way there a generation earlier — if indeed there had been such a place then, or such a democracy to foster it — he would not have been the lonely exquisite he was, but a real man in a real world.

Mary and Frank had no more than time to greet their kinsman when there was a great swell of sound from the violins, and in the sudden stopping of the talk a voice caught the very top of the note and poured out what might have been the essence of all the songs that all the milk-maids ever sang — only much truer and sweeter and far more simple than any real milk-maid's song ever was because the singer had gone clear through the trammels art sets and come out on the other side. And when this liquid song stopped as naturally as though the particular emotion that had induced it was gone, you realized how Amaryllis must have sung to herself by the river and were carried back to the times of the Fauns and Dryads and such innocence as never was.

"But," Mary said to Frank as they moved forward after the song, "we have put all that out of the world now to make way for — work!"

"Now does that mean the girl is a little hard to break into harness?" Old Andrew twinkled at her. "I thought *she would* be — I thought so."

Mary was just answering him when Mrs. West broke in:

"What are we to do with our young people, Mrs. Carver? Have you heard that Nannie Wintermute has run away from home to be — of all things! — the advance agent for a public educational lecture bureau!"

"Oh, my dear! What will they do — with Arthur's death and everything!"

"Now you must be talking of the Service girls I think," said Lady Nieth. "It is the strangest thing to see your débutantes this season! When I used to be in and out of New York before the war, the girls were a docile lot, playing about as they were told, and marrying as dutifully as a collie goes to heel. But now! — why they marry anybody, or nobody, as they choose — and they go about as though they were anxious to get out on bail! I think we manage them better in England, without the interference of the government at the critical time."

"Have you heard that young Hope has married a Mexican girl he met in Texas when he was serving in the mines? We're more or less used to pretty girls from the stage, and even to these brilliant young Russian Jewesses from the East Side — but Mexicans are new. So there's one less man for our girls — and the crop short, too!"

At the door of the smoking room two keen-eyed business men greeted each other.

"I hear you've put the Talbot boy in as manager of the up-state cannery? What's that for?"

"Had to do it, old man — had to do it! One strike after another, and the Union organizers hammering away at Albany to get more laws passed against us every time there was trouble. Old Waldron couldn't seem to get used to the idea that you could run a factory and make *money* and be good friends with the hands at the same

time. He'd never been any nearer doing factory work himself than keeping the books. So we just sent him out to California to enjoy the climate, and put in Talbot. He did his Service year in the shipyards. First thing he did was to get the men together and ask them how they wanted the place run. Put it up to them."

"Does he make it pay?"

"So far he has. He sees to it that there's nothing to strike for and so the work isn't interrupted the way it used to be."

"The new point of view — induced I suppose by the fact that every one of these young fellows have done work themselves — certainly does hit up production."

"Yes, they take it as a patriotic duty to turn out more cans of corn and peas per man per day, and to pay higher wages and work shorter hours and sell at a lower price than the next factory — and so far young Talbot's doing it."

"I don't see how they get across with it myself, but the facts bear them out — so far."

It was a wonderful mingling. Money magnates chatted with leaders of East Side women's organizations — famous painters ate ices with oriental diplomats, and society women and city politicians and soldiers and inventors ceaselessly wove together the fabric of such a real society as the world had never before known.

But tonight Mary could not feel herself a part of it — she was too rebellious at what the underlying principle of it all had dealt out to her personally.

"Let us go home, Frank — Agatha Porter has so many she will not notice."

"And all I can think to do, Frank, is to keep him here, and take him about with us everywhere, and let Mildred

see how perfectly impossible it is — Of course, we could get him into something, I suppose — "

" Yes, keep him here, Mary. Take him about all you can — we may do it that way. But if you succeed, I think it will be by showing him that Mildred doesn't fit into his world rather than by showing her that he is out of place in hers! And Mary, don't bring him to Agatha Porter's — that is where he would be happy and at home. If he thought there were more houses like that — "

" There aren't, Frank. And — I guess you are right about keeping him away."

They both agreed, and that without saying it, that their one chance was to outwardly acquiesce and play for time.

" Do you realize, Frank," said Mary suddenly, " that none of us has even mentioned Nick Van Arsdale? Oh! if it were only he! "

" I'm not sure," they were at their own door again, " that I'd feel right about it even if it were. After all, Mary, our daughter isn't like the girls of twenty years ago — and she's in a different world. She's better able to choose than you were at her age — even if I have no fault to find with your decision, my dear."

Mrs. Carver, lying sleepless as the gray dawn came in, was marshaling her forces and planning her campaign! Mildred should *not* marry John Barton — that was her starting point and the end of her argument. In between were her possible defenses, the chief and perfect one would be Nick Van Arsdale, if he were only at hand to be utilized. Well, why shouldn't he be? Confronted with Nick, surely Mildred could not persist in marrying the foreman of a mill! A workman! A common laborer! Everything else she could do, Mrs. Carver knew, was merely in the nature of a feint, a decoy, a diversion. There could be no certainty of success in any of them.

But Nick would be a solid barrier. At intervals all the next day Mrs. Carver wrote letters to Nick — wrote and destroyed them as being either too undiplomatic, too obscure or possible to misunderstand. At last she came out flatfootedly and told him that John Barton, the foreman of a flour mill, wanted to marry Mildred and that the girl was so dazzled and hypnotized that there was great danger of her marrying him before she came to herself, and so spoiling her life. Mrs. Carver admitted that she didn't know what to do about it and that she was quite hopeless. Wouldn't Nick just run back to New York and see what he could do?

Nick went out into the dark after he had read the letter and sitting down with his back to a strong trade wind almost steady enough to lean against, began to fight through again the same long round of argument he had had with his father down in Arizona — the same round he had gone over so many times by himself.

He could go back and ask Mildred to marry him, and if she did, bring her here. He looked off over the dim prairie — it was flat and dull and dead, now that the harvest was past. The horizon line, do what you would, was low, and the only drama was in the black infinity of the sky from the outermost confines of which each star seemed hung by a quivering invisible thread. No girl like Mildred could be content with the drama of nature when the human interest was left out. Or he could give up all this wonderful new existence that he had come into through the Service, could renounce his duty to his country, and stay in the old life that the sort of people he used to know took for granted — the life of leisure and travel and pleasant social intercourse and the spending of much money. But could a man who knew himself a slacker make a girl like Mildred happy?

And yet if she married this mill foreman! Nick had had his attention reluctantly focused on this John Barton before, Mildred's letters from Minneapolis had been so full of him that Nick had got a disconcerting reflection of the Sun God's luminosity. And there was the talk he had heard about him at the Christmas party, particularly from that impossible Miss Epstein, of whom Mildred seemed so fond. And they'd talked of him in Iowa, when he met Mildred's Unit in the summer!

He sprang up and beat his way against the steady push of the wind back to his lodgings.

The foreman, sending an exasperated message after him the next day, discovered that he was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI

TWO days later as John Barton came down the Carvers' stone steps whose costly whiteness he was blind to, a young man stepped up to him.

"Is this Mr. Barton?" he asked; "I'm Nicholas Van Arsdale. If you are going to your hotel, may I walk with you?"

John Barton had never heard of Nicholas Van Arsdale, but he expected surprises in New York and the lad did not look formidable.

Nick had to call on every bit of that Dutch determination which had held him building roads in the desert because he thought it was his duty to his country, in order to get started on his talk with John Barton. Out of the corner of his eye the boy studied the man of whom he had heard so much; whom he hated with a fierce, young jealousy; whom he wanted to persuade. Nick appreciated the tall, thin figure, the strong, clean features, and most particularly the charm which his age and experience might have for Mildred, as he plunged desperately into his talk. As they swung up Fifth Avenue through the alternate patches of bright light and deep shadow, the city was tidying up for the night and putting itself to bed. The last rumbling buses went by with their young Service conductors whistling on the back step; Universal Service postmen were making their last collections from the

boxes; burly night policemen had begun their rounds. New York was settling slowly upon its pillows.

"Do you want to marry her yourself?" John Barton asked bluntly when Nick had blurted out the case between them as he saw it — the case which determined Mildred's career by her marriage and hung her happiness on the man she accepted as a husband.

Nick was silent while their heels beat out the time for half a block.

"No," he said slowly, "I don't! If it were a question of marrying Mildred — just that all by itself, its — well, you know how I feel about that I guess. But I couldn't take her out to wherever I might be making roads; she'd be miserable! And I couldn't come back to New York and just live the way her people do."

"They seem pretty comfortable to me."

"They are — they're deadly comfortable — I couldn't *stand* it."

"Couldn't stand being comfortable!"

"Not that way — not giving up the work I know I ought to do — not stopping helping making roads that the government needs to move the crops and the ore and the lumber on! I can't go back on my duty to my country because I want to marry Mildred! I'm not such a poor sort as that!"

"But you'll be moving about and perhaps you'll get into something better than road making. If you waited a few years don't you think you'd be able to support her comfortably?"

"It isn't that," said Nick, "it isn't being able to support her, it is being able to make her happy! That's why I am talking to you, Mr. Barton. What I want is to make you see the reasons why Mildred ought not to marry me, *are just* exactly the reasons why she ought not to marry

you. If you care anything like as much as I do, you have no right to marry her at all."

John Barton stopped abruptly and turned on Nick. He was obviously angry with the slow white anger of New England that turns men speechless. His hands clenched themselves in his pockets, his teeth set hard. How dared this young whippersnapper try to dictate what he should or should not do!

Nick faced him bravely. Like two primitive warriors they stood opposite each other fixing the destiny of the woman they both desired. To them she was a lovely and desirable appendage — the flower of some man's life — only they differed widely from their prehistoric ancestors in that it mattered desperately to both of them that she should be happy. Was not the life they took for granted for her the natural life of the fortunate woman? Wasn't the choice they conceded to her the choice between possible husbands? Weren't they torn now with the intention of saving her from the contingency of a foolish choice? If she was not literally the prize of some man's bow and spear she was at least the prize of his powers of persuasion. That she might be expected to have plans for herself not bounded by marriage had not occurred to either of them. At last John Barton turned and walked on up the avenue.

"You don't seem to remember that she has promised to be my wife," he said finally.

"Yes, I'm considering that and also the fact that she once promised to be mine."

"What!" cried the man, turning on him.

"Oh it was when we were both kids — before we went into the Service. Nobody would let us be engaged then and when our Service year was over I couldn't stop working for the U. S. just because I didn't have to any more. So I didn't come back."

"I see. You thought you couldn't give up your work and she wouldn't be happy the way you had to live. Well, it's different in Minneapolis. I can give her a good home there. I guess we'd be able to hire help if she needed to. I can get a brick house through one of those building and loan associations and furnish it up right. I'm saving money every year. They tell me the schools are first class when we get around to need them. The city is pretty and the climate is good. I'm not going to say how much I care for her, because that is a question between her and me, but I will make it quite plain to you, young man, that I care enough."

"You don't care enough if you marry her — you wouldn't marry her if you did. You don't care as much as I do, if you don't just let her alone!"

The older man kept himself in hand.

"I look at it this way; the girl is grown up and she has the right to choose what man she'll marry. If she wants you, all right. You are young and good looking, and I suppose you're well educated. Road making isn't the job I would pick out for myself, because you can't settle down and have a home of your own — and a woman likes a home of her own, and ought to have it; but you look smart and I guess you could get into something else easily enough. You knew her pretty well before she went into the Service, and I have known her pretty well since, and I don't see any reason why she wouldn't be happy enough if she married me. It all comes back to what she wants to do."

"No," Nick broke in, "she might want to do something that would make her miserable. I want to save her from the chance of making mistakes."

"And still you don't intend to ask her yourself?"

"*No,* I don't. Because I think she oughtn't to marry

either of us — the kind of a girl she is, and the life she's had!"

"She was a good little worker in the mill," said John Barton.

"I know," said Nick desperately, "it isn't that! Mildred would work or do anything else she had to do. It's the things outside of your work or mine that would make the difference. It's the whole life that matters — she ought to be quite a different kind of a girl."

"Well," said John Barton slowly, "you haven't convinced me and you haven't persuaded me. I care for her and I am going to marry her. You have got the right to cut me out, if you can — but she's engaged to me now and I'll keep her if I can. There is just one thing I think that we ought to agree about. That is, not to tell her that we talked it over. I should think it would make a girl mad to be talked over like this."

"Yes," said Nick, "I think it would, and if you told her that I have been trying to persuade you not to marry her, I know just what she would think of me."

The older man held out his hand and Nick with his lips trembling and his brown eyes filling, put his slowly into it.

"I don't think," said John Barton slowly, "she would make a mistake in taking either of us."

"And I think," said Nick unhappily, "that it would be just like death for her to marry either you or me."

To neither of them did it occur that Mildred Carver might be anything but the natural "second" in the game of some man's career. She had spent her required term in the government service, but what of that? Wasn't she the same feminine complement she had been before?

Nick knew that having had a year of work, it was his patriotic duty to go on with it. John Barton's work was

his personal, inseparable religion. But both of them took it for granted that the duties of Mildred's citizenship had all been paid.

Nick flung round and started south again and John Barton stood watching him.

"Poor kid — he's in love with her all right, but I don't see what I can do about it. Besides he probably wouldn't be able to support her for a good while."

John Barton walked on to his hotel, thinking contentedly of the little home in Minneapolis — out in one of those new suburbs where he could buy through a building and loan association. He'd get her an upright piano — perhaps a Victrola, if Mildred would rather have it — and they'd keep a girl. His mind pictured transiently a golden oak dining table with a highly varnished top and machine carved chairs and a sideboard to match. He seemed to get a flash of bright color from the rug and see lace curtains hanging primly at the windows. All these dreams of the future were plain to John Barton, but the realities of the present were heavily obscured. He could see the straight road from the mill where he earned his modest salary to the little red brick cottage where he meant to spend it, but he never even suspected the devious network that led from mines and mills and factories, from railroads and public utilities, from government bonds and steamship securities, from foreign investments and domestic holdings, to the house on Washington Square. The signs of great wealth were not visible to him because they manifested themselves in forms he did not know. Had Mrs. Carver been bedecked with diamonds instead of wearing around her neck a modest string of what looked to him like white beads, — had she rustled in silk — had Mildred's arms clinked bracelets and her clothes dripped *lace he might* have understood. But what was a simple

red brick house facing an imperfectly groomed park that it should enlighten him. He intended to have a red brick house himself shortly and there were plenty of parks in Minneapolis. Of the cash equivalents of pictures and draperies, rugs and china he knew nothing. He had never bought a chair or a table or a dish in his life. There did seem to be a good deal of "help" about, but that was probably a New York custom — and they did have a motor. Well, didn't he hope to buy a Ford when they got the house paid for? The Carvers were well off — he could see that — but he was not conscious of any overwhelming financial disparity between him and Mildred. And then his mind settled on something very small and soft and warm, being rocked by the fireside, and something very fat and blond learning to walk, and something very active and vigorous, and perhaps a little unruly swinging his books by a strap on his way to school. And John Barton's eyes crinkled up at the corners and his teeth gleamed between his lips as he entered the lobby of his modest hotel.

The next day Nick entering the Carver house just as luncheon was over, saw John Barton catch at Mildred's hand as they left the dining room.

"Nick," cried Mildred when she saw him. "Oh, Nick!" and then recovering herself, she held out her hand quite formally. Mrs. Carver greeted him with a little anxious catch of the breath and Ruthie and Junior fell upon him in glee.

Mildred turned to introduce the two men but John Barton said gravely:

"I met Mr. Van Arsdale last night."

There was something of the condemnatory preacher in his tone.

Mildred looked from one to the other in surprise.

"We took a walk together — and had a talk."

"Yes," said Nick with a quaver in his voice, "we had a talk and I want to have another now — and Mildred with us."

"I don't think that would be necessary — and I don't see that we have anything to talk over anyway. — I thought we settled it last night."

Mildred, the last vestige of color gone from her face, turned into the library.

"Come in here, please," she said in a high little voice.

Her mother hesitated on the threshold and then let the three go in without her. She realized that her work on that situation was done. She had written for Nick and he was here. The immemorial triangle of two men wanting the same woman had been created and they must solve it between them.— As she went up the long curving stairs she was trembling — so much hung in the balance of the next half hour!

Out by the great fireplace Mildred faced the two men, though her cheeks were white and her lips trembling.

"Well?" she questioned in a clear, light voice, as sober as a bell and as insistent.

They were dumb before her — she seemed to them both quite suddenly, to be another person from the young girl whose happiness they were so concerned in safe-guarding — an individual, an independent human being quite able to determine her own life and with plenty of characteristics in addition to charm and lovableness. They had both thought of her as looking at life through eyes only half opened to the things they saw in it. What could the obligation to serve the state mean to her now that her Service year was done? But she stood as a new thing, — a judge set over them.

"Well?" she questioned insistently.

John Barton turned to Nick as if to offer him the first chance to speak and Nick regarded him resentfully.

"Mildred, I heard that you were going to marry Mr. Barton and I came back to ask you not to!"

John Barton interrupted him:

"He waited for me when I left you last night and tried to persuade me not to marry you — I thought we agreed not to mention the matter to you — but Mr. Van Arsdale seems not to have understood it that way."

"I know that was what we said, but I've been thinking of it ever since and I know we were wrong and that I hadn't any right to keep my agreement about it. It's so awful anyway that just breaking my word doesn't seem to matter. I care so much more about not having you miserable than looking like a cad," Nick plunged ahead.

"I did ask him — Mr. Barton, not to marry you. I told him he'd no right to ask you to live in such a different way and among such different people. And the things girls like to do just aren't in Minneapolis to be done. You'd hate it! You wouldn't be happy and I couldn't stand it not to have you happy — Mildred!"

Nick, growing incoherent, put the weakest side of his case foremost. As Mildred looked at him her color came back and her eyes began to flash with a light that was not at all gentle.

"I don't see, Nick, how it can matter to you."

The boy crimsoned.

"I know Mildred — I should think you'd feel just that way — only — you know, don't you — that's the reason I stayed away? I knew you'd hate the kind of life out there in the desert or anywhere else where there weren't any roads and had to be some built. It wouldn't be right to take you way out there — even if — you — "

"Even if I wanted to go?"

Nick looked at her unhappily.

"What do you think I want to do, Nick?"

"Why, what every other girl does, I suppose, — have a good time and get married."

"Well, I don't — or at least that's only part of it. I want to work! I'm a citizen just as much as anybody else and I've got to give my share of patriotic service just like any man or any ten men. I've got to do something that needs to be done!"

A light began to grow in Nick's eyes and he stepped hastily towards her; this was a new Mildred he had never dreamed of — but she drew near to John Barton's side and slipped her hand in his —

"And so I'm going to marry the most splendid and noble man there could be, Nick. It doesn't matter whether I live in Kamchatka or the middle of the Sahara Desert — it's all the same. I'm going to help him to see that the flour's made right and packed right, and shipped on time; and I couldn't help being happy doing that, could I? I can get along without the concerts and the dances and the dinners and the shows — we didn't have any of these things in the Service and I didn't miss them half as much as I miss the Service now. And as for the *people* — Why, Nick, I met every kind of people there are while I was out there, and now I just meet all the same kind. It's so *dull.* I can't *stand* it, being so uninterested all the time! And so I'm going to be married, Nick, and work and do a lot for the country just as though I were in the Service all my life. You needn't bother about my being happy — I couldn't be anything else!"

Nick stood looking at her, his mouth a little open — he tried to interrupt her several times and failed. He was younger than John Barton and the implications of what she said struck him more quickly — the real Mildred of the new day was more visible to him. He felt *that he must* define his own changing attitude, but John

Barton drew Mildred's hand through his arm and stood beside her.

"You said, last night, Mr. Van Arsdale, that if I cared for Mildred, I wouldn't marry her because the life she'd lead would make her unhappy. I guess you can see that that wouldn't be so. Of course she won't have to work the way she's thinking of. I earn enough to take care of her."

"Not work? Why, of *course,* I'll work. It isn't a question of *having* to! It's what I want to do!"

It was evident that John Barton didn't take her seriously. He had got just so far in democracy as the idea that it was the patriotic duty of all men to serve their country all the time, but he hadn't extended his idea to include all women, — certainly not to include his prospective wife.

Nick felt he must try to make her see.

"But just marrying and going to live in Minneapolis isn't all there is to it, Mildred; — and just working in Minneapolis doesn't make the people or the place any different. If you don't mind the way it is away from New York — why, you know, it isn't much worse in Arizona or Kansas or anywhere else where they're making *roads.* —And they're as important — roads are — as anything! Why, you can't even get the wheat up to the flour mill without them! So, if you'd go to Minneapolis to live — why wouldn't you — "

Nick was stopped because he couldn't understand why Mildred was looking at him from some remote glacial epoch. He had no idea what he had done, but he stopped abruptly in his certainty that he had done something.

"Nick," said Mildred at last, very slowly and with a dangerous iced intensity, "Nick, suppose you don't go on with that. You don't seem to understand that I love John Barton."

The boy looked at her silently, while the new light died out of his eyes, and then said hoarsely: —

"No, I didn't understand. — I beg your pardon, Mildred. But don't you see that he doesn't understand either?" And turning, he went out through the swishing velvet portières over the silence-compelling rugs.

Mrs. Carver, watching him down the street, saw the droop of his shoulders and the uncertainty of his steps, saw how he started to turn automatically up Fifth Avenue and then as automatically went south and plunged into the mazes of Greenwich Village and realized that her attempt at direct action had failed. There was nothing for it now but a flank attack.

Mrs. Carver made her next appeal subtly and indirectly to John Barton. The only stipulation she made — she got Frank to agree to it — was that before there was any formal engagement Mildred and John Barton should have a chance to know each other better. Ostensibly to that end, the Carvers began to take him about and introduce him socially as they would if he had been lord of an independent dukedom.

"Does your father put on his 'glad rags' every night?" John Barton inquired of Mildred.

"Why, yes!" she answered innocently.

So he betook himself to a ready made clothing store that he saw on Broadway, and bought evening clothes recommended by the clerk — never in his life had he had a suit made to order. As a matter of fact it sat well on his lank frame — better than he thought it did. His shoes were not quite right, and his tie was not quite right, and his hat and coat were very wrong, indeed — but he didn't know it.

The first thing was a dance of the débutante set. John *Barton* danced? Yes, certainly! He waltzed with the

sure swing of the raw-boned New Englander, in the old-fashioned way which so few of the younger people have taken the trouble to learn. But he only waltzed. As he swung Mildred out upon the floor, she fell in with his step with the adaptability of a good dancer. Had they been alone in the ballroom she would have been perfectly happy. As it was, she felt uncomfortably conspicuous. In between the dances John Barton got on very well, so long as the talk was impersonal, for the girls had been in the Universal Service. But there were older women there, and with them John Barton was wholly at a loss.

He could look at them and admire them, and watch the twinkle of their jewels, but there was no basis of common experience for talk between them. Occasionally he waltzed with Mildred. After he had seen the newer kind of dancing, he did not dare try it with any one else. For the most part he stood silently looking on, his appreciative eyes following the young girls, their delicate gold and silver slippers, their well coiffed heads, their fragile, glistening clothes, their flower-white shoulders. His eyes followed Mildred about, the Spirit of Felicity she seemed to him, as one man after another danced with her. There were a few boys of her own age with whom she frolicked frankly, some older men, not so acceptable in his eyes, and repeatedly Apperson Forbes, whose name he did not know, but whose tall, lean frame, an inheritance from pioneer ancestors, was not unlike his own. Somehow, John Barton resented his dancing with Mildred.

He was looking forward to the ride home as the best part of the ball, when Mrs. Carver dropped in from where she had been dining. She stood beside him and pointed out the people with significant explanations.

"Ah — there is Mrs. Deversey — see, in white over by

the door — I didn't know she was in town. And young Tommy Sloan dancing with the girl in pink — they're the Railroad group, you know."

And so on and on — the old names that are international and the new names that are coming in. John Barton had never read the society columns of a newspaper in his life, but this sounded to him like a financial rating. He was visibly disturbed by it. What his untrained observations hadn't told him, what his ignorance of society values in general and New York conditions in particular, had left him ignorant of, Mrs. Carver's seemingly casual comments were beating in on his consciousness. But were the Carvers necessarily rich because their friends had money!

The drive home was unsatisfying. How affectionate can a diffident man be in the presence of his intended mother-in-law?

Mildred had caught her foot in the frill of her gown, making an ugly rent.

"Is that the little dress Annette made you?" her mother asked her casually.

"No, mother, it's one of the French ones, and I'm afraid Henriette can't mend it."

"Probably not," said Mrs. Carver indifferently.

This, too, was disconcerting to John Barton. The wife of the foreman of a mill could have no such detached attitude toward clothes.

They took John Barton to the opera and he sat there wondering what it was all about, and looking at the lovely ladies, some of whom he had seen at the dance, and at Mildred in front of him in the box — Mildred in quite a different dress, of which she was apparently unconscious, carried away from the things of this world by music which seemed to him to have neither melody, time nor

meaning. What did he know of this art that gave her so much pleasure? She would never hear opera in Minneapolis — was she going to miss it much? There would be concerts, of course, and the theater. It would cost them — let's see, — three dollars, every time they went. It wouldn't be often they could go.

And after the opera, the rich limousine and the uniformed Wicks seated beside the uniformed chauffeur, and stopping for a very wonderful little supper at Sherry's on the way home; and there finding people they knew, also richly dressed and eating delicate and costly food and talking gayly about a great variety of things he understood as little as he had understood the opera. And then on again in the motor to his modest hotel.

John Barton was conscious of extreme exasperation as he struggled out of his white tie. He had come to New York with a great hope in his heart; he had asked Mildred to marry him and she had consented. The most wonderful and still the most natural thing in the world! And Mr. and Mrs. Carver had made no real objection — that they should ask for a chance to know him better before there was any talk of immediate marriage was no more than reasonable — and he was seeing Mildred every day, a wonderful thing in itself! But what good did it do him? He was all meshed up with other people and other things, — clothes and dancing and music, and restaurants and jewelry and motor cars and servants and various extraneous affairs, that no sensible human being would think had anything to do with his marrying Mildred and which yet seemed to form a perfect abatis between her and him.

He flung his hated dress coat on the bed and throwing himself on a chair, thrust his hands into his pockets as he tried to think out this social organization which made the

love of men and women the slave of up-getting and down-sitting, of eating and drinking and talking and riding. It seemed to John Barton as though he were in the processes of suffocation consequent upon being swallowed. He wasn't getting better acquainted with Mildred — he was simply finding out how she lived.

He was beginning slowly to grasp the significance of the Carver ménage. Waddell and Wicks and the other servants, whom he had rather ignored before, began to rise before his startled eyes. The bevy of motors, the country estate, the talk of travel, could only mean one thing. Did he — John Barton — who earned his living by the sweat of his brow and liked the job, want to be under the stigma of marrying a rich wife? Money had not been mentioned by any one since he came but he began to know the signs of it.

They were really pretty well fixed, he thought — but just what vast stores of wealth, inherited and acquired, lay back of them he didn't yet dream. And should he let the fact of money come between Mildred and himself? Wasn't it just as bad for a girl as for a man to lose the one she loved? He wouldn't have let Mildred refuse him if she'd been poor and he'd been rich — and since she loved him!

One night Mrs. Carver gave a dinner, and John Barton was full of trepidation at the prospect. This formal eating, even in the modified form practiced in restaurants, disturbed him.

He found himself next Lady Nieth — gorgeous in satin that seemed to him to have several colors at once; sparkling as though a vast number of jewels had been poured upon her haphazard and caught where they fell, some in her hair, some on her neck, and many casually adhering to the front of her gown. Lady Nieth exhib-

ited, also, an unexampled amount of very beautiful skin at which it embarrassed him to be seen looking. Exactly how to address her he didn't know and tried to avoid it by circumlocution. And then Mildred was not beside him where he could touch her hand, but on the other side of the table, dimpling and sparkling between Mr. Apperson Forbes and an English diplomat, handsome, flaccid and very tired, who seemed to drink in her youth and beauty like an elixir, and to defer graciously to her words. John Barton saw this in surprise, for to him Mildred was not an incipient intellectual force but a lovely young female. But he was kept busy trying not to be disconcerted by Waddell and the footmen, or to trip over his forks, and to conceal the fact that he thought he had finished after each course and was surprised when another dish was offered him. Mildred, glancing across at him between the courtesies of the diplomat and the amorous attentions of Apperson Forbes, could not help being conscious of these fumblings. And John Barton, struggling distressfully, could not avoid seeing that she saw. Mildred felt herself flush with embarrassment; not, she told herself, that they meant anything or were of the least consequence. It was so much more important that a prophet should prophesy greatly than that his use of table silver should accord with the customs of the Carver family. But because it brought before her a sudden picture of Nick with his white lips and hurt eyes and she wanted to put him out of her mind.

And then, some one spoke across the table in a softly worded criticism of the policy that had put the control of the grain traffic into the hands of the farmers, and the answer came back with a gentle stricture on leaving the management of business to a government that didn't proceed on business principles. And John Barton caught the quick skipping rope of the talk with a firm hand.

"It seems to me to be working very well, — from the standpoint of getting things that the people want done as they want them." It was almost the first word he had initiated and Lady Nieth hastily took her shoulder out of his way as she turned toward him.

"Yes, but oughtn't they to be done *efficiently,* if they're to go on?" It was the diplomat beside Mildred who had spoken.

"Isn't the first count in efficiency what you're doing it *for?* You see I'm the foreman of a government flour mill and it's always seemed to me that the basis from which all efficiency had to start, in my work, was getting flour milled and shipped to the people."

Mildred was leaning back in her chair now, smiling straight at him. This was the prophet she followed! John Barton saw it and gathered up the skein of the talk. Again it was the tongue of flame and the eyes of the seer! He would have made a great priest, Frank Carver thought as he listened. He painted the picture again as Mildred had heard him in the Unit when she had thought his head was touched with light and his lips with the fire of God. The wheat grew under his words and all the world was fed — it was the romantic passion of a great obsession. The table was his congregation and he carried them with him. Even Mary Carver was compelled to admiration, and Frank told himself that this was a man of power, of whose kinship he should be proud. But then John Barton faltered, and picking up his fork he thrust it absently into the table cover and his wine glass overturned and the gold of his enthusiasm was transmuted into embarrassment.

And then the blessed end to the eating came and the women, in harem-derived custom, floated into the drawing room, leaving the men behind them.

With the men alone, John Barton was more at ease. He answered their questions as to the development of the Northwest and the democratization of industry as one who had real things to say. A trim, gray-haired man moved over beside him to ask just how effective he had found the Service boys and girls in the mill; were they really good workers in the purely business sense? Frank Carver overheard the query and laughed a little.

"Trying to find out if the boy earned his salt at the road making, Van Arsdale?"

"Van Arsdale!" So this was the father of the boy who hadn't wanted him to marry Mildred! Obviously that boy belonged with these people who lived so differently from the way people did in Minneapolis — the way he himself intended to live. Not that it was a matter of any consequence, of course.

John Barton showed well as a human being in that brief interval before they came into the drawing room, out of the smoke of the men's cigars into the smoke of the women's cigarettes, and to Mildred at the coffee table in the old fashion which still pleased the Carvers. He found Mildred a little flushed and rebellious for she had heard Lady Nieth ask her mother where she had discovered John Barton, as though here were a new variety of garden gourd, — and had heard her mother answer with truthful but most deceptive unconcern:

"Oh, it's his mill my daughter worked in last year. Mr. Carver met him out there and thought him rather remarkable."

"Distinctly!"

And Lady Nieth turned, cigarette in hand, to watch him come in as though he were something between a trained dog and an African Prince.

"Didn't you tell me in Minneapolis that you wanted to see a steel mill?" Frank asked John Barton next day. "We can motor down, if you care to — a small, subsidiary mill, but you'll get the processes."

Can one refuse a coveted father-in-law? John Barton won so much of grace that Mildred joined the party.

Here the foreman was on his own ground and there was clear man's talk with the workmen in the different divisions of the mill — a talk between craftsmen in which Mildred wanted to join.

"Show us again that very hard steel they're experimenting with, father, please."

And they were led into the laboratory.

"It's for reaper blades —" Mildred explained. "I told father how they broke on my machine in Dakota and he's having them try this hard kind of steel for them."

John Barton stopped abruptly and turned on Frank.

"Do you own this mill?"

"Well — well — practically I do."

"Then you're *the* Carver — the one in steel?"

"Yes — I — that is — yes."

"Oh, God! Why didn't I know!"

The next day was his last in New York and John Barton had begged that he and Mildred might have it to themselves.

"I want to see her alone, Mrs. Carver," he said frankly. "I want to go somewhere in the morning and take her to lunch, and then be by ourselves in the afternoon."

"If you take the motor —"

"No, not the motor," he said firmly, "just Mildred and me."

And they went.

It was a hard and wonderful day for both of them; happy, a little ecstatic, and tragically sad. They had gone in mid-morning over to Staten Island and out along that beach, dropped like a jewel in the pocket of the town, and then turning inland had struck across the frozen marshes toward the high land.

John Barton had waited his whole life for this splendid young mate. His heart sang and the blood sped to his cheeks as he tramped up the beach beside her. It was love of her little hands and trim feet — of her blue eyes and her gold hair — her swift gleaming smile and the quick up-scale laugh that followed it — the soft red that flooded to her low, well set little ears when he kissed her suddenly. In between these moments of joy he tried to make love to her in words.

But here he met with difficulty. Mildred wanted him, when it came to talking, not to tell her how beautiful she was, or how he thought of her night and day, or how happy they were going to be in Minneapolis, but of the wonderful work of feeding the people and how she was going to help him do it. She wanted him to paint her future as an assistant priest at the altar. It was a sort of religious exaltation she craved from him, a thing that neither the church nor any social effort had ever been able to give her — nothing but John Barton himself speaking as the Priest of the Service. She wanted from him the same things that earlier generations had got from the perfume of ascending incense, from the Perpetual Adoration and the chanting and the rolling organ; what, earlier still had come through the witch dances and the dervishes; and way, way back in the dim, almost prehuman stage, from the shaking of the war gourds, the sight of the war feathers and the swift rush of the tribe on the common foe, — this, and a chance to put her de-

veloping creative instinct into work, — a chance to serve her country. With John Barton it was the mating instinct, strong, clean and direct. With Mildred it was something quite different, more complex, and far more difficult to satisfy. She got much more joy out of the sound of his voice telling how the farmers of the northwest organized the Nonpartisan League, than out of the touch of his lips on hers. She didn't analyze her own sensations, was quite unconscious what they meant; but again and again she turned the love talk into talk of the things he was doing and that she would do with him; and again and again he turned it back. At last he seemed to understand and fell silent. They were climbing up Tode Hill Road when they came to a little leafless wood with a carpet of fallen oak leaves and the blue bay spread out before them. Mildred stopped to catch her breath. Her cheeks were flushed with the crisp air, her eyes were shining, her lips were smiling with happiness. Never had she looked more beautiful.

"Will you be too cold if we sit here on this little wall for a moment?" he asked very gravely.

He took her left hand out of her muff — pulled off the glove finger by finger, and put it gravely to his lips.

"Mildred, I love you with all the love there is in me — but I'm afraid that you don't love me."

The girl protested in frightened haste.

"I know you think you love me, dear — it isn't that. It's that you don't know."

It was a very sober hour for both of them when John Barton put the case against himself. Honestly and deliberately he did it, as an upright man who would not take what was not his merely because he could get it. The case was two-fold, — the first and lesser part, that the things she must give up as his wife would make life a

hardship for her. The second and great part, that she didn't care for him as she thought she did. John Barton said in everything but words that the rôle of prophet wasn't the one he cared to fill. He was a lover and he wanted to be loved, not as a leader, but as a man.

There was one moment when Mildred turned to him, holding out her hands.

"But I can't give it up — I can't! Don't leave me with nothing in the world to *do!* Why, it's like being dead!"

Then he caught her to him again, but only for a moment. He sprang to his feet and tramped resolutely up the road and resolutely back. Out of his pocket he took a little case and out of it a ring, perfectly conventional and set with a little diamond. Catching up her bare left hand, he slipped it on the third finger.

"Mildred, this is a sign that I'm not going to marry the woman I love more than my own soul — will you wear it for me?"

When they got back to the house in Washington Square she was white and drawn as she had never been before.

"I must see your father and mother before I go."

John Barton stood bravely before them, his arm around Mildred.

"I want to tell you that we are not going to be married. I have found that I love your daughter too much to take her, even with her own consent, unless I am sure that she loves me more than she loves the work I am doing. She has told me that she hasn't anything to do — any real work — that she cares about. I wish that you would let her go on working. She made a good record in the mill, and in the field, too. I don't suppose you knew that what she was really going to marry me for, was a job — and that's almost as bad as marrying for a

home. I'd just like to say, now that I'm at it, that I appreciate the way you've acted toward me — you've been white. I know how you must have felt about Mildred's marrying me — brought up as she's been and living the way you do. You didn't think I cared about the money, I know, because I guess it must have been pretty plain I didn't know about it. You knew I wasn't a fortune hunter, anyway. It's a bad thing when anything has got to come between a man and a woman except not loving each other — when we get the world fixed right, there won't. Well, good-bye."

Frank Carver wrung his hand.

"John Barton," he said thickly, "I wish my daughter *did* love you."

Mary, standing by her daughter, victorious, had nothing to say.

"If I could just speak a word to her alone — " the man faltered a little.

Frank swept his wife out into the hall.

Half an hour later Wicks coming to turn on the lights found his young mistress crying, alone, on the arm of the great leather sofa before the fire and stole noiselessly away.

CHAPTER XXVII

MRS. CARVER had not taken John Barton's request that they let Mildred go to work at all seriously. Wouldn't a girl of any spirit turn against the suggestions of a man who had refused to marry her? Wouldn't she therefore be more susceptible to the attentions of some one else? Unfortunately Mrs. Carver had no suitor in sight but Apperson Forbes. The list of eligibles seemed even smaller than at the time of Mildred's début. So many of those who had seemed to escape the infection of the Service at first had succumbed to it later and gone into some sort of work that took them out of their traditional setting! Mary Carver couldn't reconcile herself to Apperson Forbes, and she began making plans to take Mildred abroad. Things *couldn't* be so bad in England!

But Mildred didn't want to go to England or to France or the Orient. She wasn't interested in marriage, she wanted to work and she would by no means accept the practice of philanthropy or uplift as a substitute. Even Old Andrew was a Job's comforter.

"What you doing with the girl, Mary?" he inquired. "Going to let her marry Forbes?"

"Not if I can help it!"

"What does she want to do?"

"She wants to go to work."

"Well, why not let her? Can't Frank find her a job? Frank!" as his nephew came to greet him, "Why don't

you give your daughter a job?" and then pattering over to his grand niece behind the silver coffee urn, "Mildred, I'm trying to get your father to set you to work — seems to me you're a useless ornament. I want Frank to break you in at the Long Island Steel Plant."

"But there aren't any women working there," objected Frank Carver, "at least I think not."

"Well, put 'em in. Perhaps we've got an industrial imagination floating around in this part of the family and we don't want any hated rival to get the advantage of it."

"Oh, father, would you let me work there — on the super-steel, you know?"

"Certainly, Mildred," said Frank, looking into the earnest eyes of his daughter and remembering the entreaties of the foreman of the mill, his almost son-in-law.

It is probable that the promise of work on the super-steel which Frank Carver had given his daughter so lightly might have been laid indefinitely on the table of the family council if an official document had not arrived to keep it before the house. It was a large formidable document very much like the one that had summoned Mildred into the Universal Service, except that it was marked "Department of Agriculture" and instead of being a command to service, was an offer of work.

The document stated that her record in the Service had been high enough to entitle her to a position as professional tractor driver and leader of a tractor team in the field service. She would be paid her living expenses and sixty dollars a month from the beginning of April to the last of October with two weeks' rest in July. If she wished the position she must accept it within a month.

Mildred showed the document to her parents.

"That is something that needs to be done," she com-

mented significantly. "It's a patriotic service — helping to feed the people of the United States. I'd be going on with my duty as a citizen. Besides, I like it and I know how."

"Mildred, do you *want* to do it? Do you want to leave us for as long as that?"

"No, Mother, I hate to go away from home, but I don't want to go back on my job, either. I wouldn't have any right to do that, and there doesn't seem to be anything here for me to do. — The uniforms are almost exactly like the ones we wore in the Service only the collars are blue and after the first year I get a band on my sleeve. I think the place to get them is the Agricultural Commissary down by the river."

Mrs. Carver thought her determined young daughter had never looked so beautiful as now that she held the winning cards in the struggle between them. It was the leverage of this official offer of work that stirred Frank Carver to bring his rival job of work on super-steel into quick competition.

So a square, business-like desk in the little office next to the laboratory was the door of the world that finally opened to Mildred, and she set her feet joyously and with a good deal of confidence in the new country she found beyond. Her first interest was to find uses for the new super-steel in agriculture. The fact that she had broken so many reaper blades in North Dakota was her point of departure, and from that bit of sure knowledge acquired by original research, she had to find out other directions where super-steel could be used. And this led her into the realm of mechanics and she sat at the feet of machinists in the mill, and studied trade journals and technical papers, and this again led to a study of advertising as a means of making the people who ought to use super-steel

know that such a thing existed. Mildred, provided with a stenographer of her own, plunged into all these fields at once.

Early, six mornings in the week, Mildred went over to the factory office. She arrived there at nine — late for a factory hand — early for Mildred. To be sure this promptness required the coöperation of Henriette who in a state of moral protest woke her and helped her to dress; of the cook who in a state of overt rebellion rose specially early to get breakfast for her; of Wicks, who in a state of wistful exaltation drove her to the railroad station in time to catch her train. But though it seriously disrupted the smooth running domestic machine in Washington Square, it accomplished its purpose of getting the new super-steel manager to the factory on time.

All day Mildred worked in the office trying to discover new uses for super-steel, or getting in touch with people who might use it. Her letters signed " M. Carver " were taken to be from a member of the firm and treated with respect. But when she called in person on representatives of manufacturing plants, the appearance of a lovely young girl where they had expected to find a mature business man, sometimes created confusion.

It is not probable that Mildred was the best promoter the firm might have commanded — how could she be? But that was not the reason she was there. Frank Carver gave her that chance, as he would have given her necklaces and rings — as he had given her dolls in the past or would buy her a duke in the future if she wanted it. But it is true that some of the qualities that had been bred into the Carver line from generations of having what they wanted; the tacit habit of success; the expectation of being listened to; carried her a long way. And then *there was* the old commercial ability latent in the family

and under these favoring circumstances it began to sprout and grow.

All day Mildred stayed at her work and at five made a dash for her train, and as she entered New York was met by the motor and took up her old life again. There was time to dress for dinner; there were dances and theaters to go to; there was quite as much attention from men as she had received before — more of it perhaps. Her mother thought at first that it would be easy to divert her from the factory on occasion, but the year's discipline held, and what social life she couldn't get in the evenings she seemed willing to do without.

All but one of her problems were solving themselves. She was doing something that she felt needed to be done for the country; something she liked to do and that interested her! something that John Barton, still her prophet of industry, would approve; but —

Well, she sometimes thought of Nick coming back and saying how he loved her, and begging her to marry him, and of her saying, very stern and noble:

"No, Nick, the Mildred that you cared for is gone — It isn't me you love. I have plans that your wife couldn't carry out. The world is going to be better fed because I have lived."

And Nick would go on with his life of idle pleasure which he had taken up when he tired of road making, but always saying with Lord Tennyson in his heart:

"We needs must love the highest when we see it!"

And then another picture showed her Nick being killed somewhere in Arizona, where he was supposed to be now — killed just because he was careless or something, and herself going out to his grave on the lonely mesa and planting flowers about it, and then coming back saddened to her great work for the world. And every year she

would go there on the same day. And her hair would gradually turn white, and people would look at her and whisper to each other:

"See, that's Mildred Carver! She's the one who did the great work of introducing super-steel to the world. Oh, no, she never married. It is said that she once loved a young man, and he died, but of course nobody really knows. Such a sad and noble face!"

And there was another picture of herself cut off by an untimely death, brought about in some undefined way in the pursuit of her job. And as she lay cold and still, Nick came and looked at her and the slow, hot tears ran down his cheeks at the thought of what had gone out of his life. There was a variant of this picture that brought Nick back after many, many years to stand beside the grass growing long over her grave. His wife would be beside him — a wholly unattractive young person as different as possible from herself — and he would mentally compare them, and think how he had lost the best thing out of his life, but all he would say to the young person beside him was:

"She was Mildred Carver, and she died long years ago."

Mildred was very sorry for herself as she looked at these pictures. It had been settled that Ruth Ansel and her cousin David were to be married and manage the Northfield Mill together, but it was quite clear that she must go through life unloved. Only men that she wouldn't think of marrying cared for her. John Barton had refused to marry her, and Nick had forgotten!

CHAPTER XXVIII

NICK wasn't in Arizona as Mildred thought. He was helping to lay a road which would provide an additional highway on which the wheat crop of the Red River Valley could be rushed down to Fargo on its way to Minneapolis. It was pleasant work, not over difficult — there were no great changes of level, no serious bridging or excavating or filling in,— just a straightaway problem of making the best road for transport trucks from the materials at hand. But Nick was moody about it — he didn't see why the expert at the head of the gang did as he did when any one of a half dozen ways he himself could have suggested would have been so much better. He had moments when the whole business of covering the country with roads seemed of obscure value anyway. Let 'em pack their traps on their backs as the Indians did! Or let 'em go live in New York City where the roads were made already!

And one day when he had flung himself down in the dreary little lobby of a dreary little town hotel to wait till a heavy rain stopped and the work could go forward, who should come stamping in, shaking the water from his rubber coat, but John Barton. Nick jumped to his feet in a sudden involuntary spasm of rage. The man seemed so to embody all that made life hateful to him. But after a moment he turned away, and then after another self-conquering pause, turned back and held out his hand to the man who he supposed was his successful rival. John Barton took it in considerable embarrassment. He

had been so certain that Mildred loved him — had so insisted on that fact to Nick — and then had convinced himself that she didn't! Could the boy know all this? If he did, how amused he must be at the situation! And yet he didn't look amused, he looked embarrassed and unhappy.

"I thought you were working in Kansas," commented John Barton.

"I was, but they've sent me up to help on these roads. They tell me they're so bad that they've fallen down on the job of getting the wheat into the mills on time."

"They have! That's what I'm here to see about. The supply was short at the mill and I sent to Fargo to find out about it and they told me the trouble was farther along — they weren't getting the wheat themselves. So I came on to look into the business, and I guess it's a matter of transportation — of roads — the trucks don't stand the wear and tear. We seem to be on the same job, Mr. Van Arsdale. What are the prospects?"

"I don't think they're very good. The material we've got to make roads of is poor and the rains wash them into ruts. It looks to me as much a question of getting better built, tougher trucks as of getting better roads. We can only build roads up to a certain grade, so we have got to get trucks to suit them."

"You want to synchronize them? Well, can you do it?"

"As far as I can see — you know I'm only assistant foreman, Mr. Barton — it gets right back to the quality of the steel. If they can get hard enough, tough enough steel for the essential parts of the trucks, we can build roads they can travel over."

"What you need," said John Barton slowly, "is super-*steel.*"

"What's that?"

"A new product got out by the Carver Mills that Mildred Carver is trying to put on the market."

"What do you mean? Where is she? I thought — she — you!"

"Come out here, Van Arsdale — will you? It's only fair to tell you about it — if you haven't heard."

As honestly as he had told the girl he loved why he would not marry her, he told Nick what had happened.

"I guess you were right about her not being happy with me — but not for the same reason. I hope she'll be happy with somebody."

And that was why Waddell opening the door one Sunday afternoon at the end of March ushered Nick Van Arsdale into the still, sweet air of the old settled, easy existence which he thought he had left so far behind him! As the hangings swung together a wave of perfume rose from a bowl of Chinese lilies — a rich, heavy, indolent perfume, — that somehow mingled with the afternoon sunlight saturating the silk curtains, and with the quick frivolous tick of the French clock, and with the slow softness of the Persian cat that came stepping toward him. It was a world where it was inconceivable that anything could happen suddenly or without due consideration, a world fixed beyond the thought of change. Nick walked over to the white fireplace and set his shoulder defiantly against it. The Persian cat, stealing softly after him, circled round his feet.

As Mildred came slowly down the long stairs to receive him she felt herself dipping into a stream of emotion and threw up her chin as though to keep it above water. When she stepped through the curtains Nick looked up and caught his breath. Her lips were a little apart, her color came and went, her eyes were twin blue stars, but

the light that was in them he didn't understand. He didn't think or reason — he didn't remember that there was such a place as Kansas or such things as roads; he forgot that this old life was a suffocating thing which he couldn't go back to — he forgot everything but Mildred as he caught her in his arms and kissed her. But after the first moment he felt both her hands pushing against him and stepped quickly away.

"Oh, Nick — Nick — don't!" she cried.

They stood apart from each other — these two young citizens of the democracy in embarrassed silence, frightened at their own emotion. This was not what they had intended. It had done itself.

Mildred looking at Nick thought that he had never seemed so definitely an aristocrat, so far removed from any possible understanding of the new kind of things she had grown to care for — of work, and what it ought to mean to everybody to be a citizen. And yet never had he seemed so attractive, so personally dear and desirable. But she knew she was going to stand by her resolve!

"Mildred," said Nick, and there was a new tone of assurance in his voice, "Mildred, I've come back to ask you to marry me. I've tried to make myself believe that I could get on without you and I find I can't. I'm not going to wait while you try and decide whether you love me more than anybody else or even if you love me at all. I'm just going to make you marry me because I love you so much."

The girl colored with resentment.

"I know I acted like a fool when I was here before, — when I talked to Mr. Barton. I guess I didn't know how sore I was till afterward, and I know I hadn't an idea how *much* I loved you. But you've just got to forgive me be*cause I know* better now — you've got to."

Mildred looked down at her fluttering fingers — they were a little stained with the ink with which she signed the firm letters — Henriette couldn't get it all off. When he paused for breath she began.

"Nick!" her voice was very low, "Nick, I've got to tell you something right away. It's — it's very important. I — I don't think you'd like to marry me now — even if you think you would — I'm quite different from what you think I am — from what I used to be — I'm not the kind of a girl you'd like any more at all."

"Not the kind of a girl? Oh, Mildred, there couldn't be anybody else in the world I'd care for. I know you're trying to let me down easy. And I can't bear to think of it — but — but."

"Nick!"

"But I've got to make you understand."

Mildred's face was changing, — the boy plunged on.

"You see, Mildred, I just can't go on with the kind of thing you're used to — not after my Service year, I can't. Why, when I think of Torexo and seats under every tree and the cut grass; and then of the way it looks in Arizona when you're up on a rock at sunrise and the valley below gets blue and purple and pink — and then you plan out where a road ought to go and *help to put it there* — Oh, Lord! I got to thinking of that house in Fifty-sixth Street father's keeping for me to live in — just the same sort of a house I've always seen — and even when I thought of your being there, I couldn't seem to stand it at all. It's beastly to say this to you only it would be worse for me not to."

Nick caught his breath but he didn't look up and forced himself to go on.

"And so, Mildred, that was why I stayed away. I didn't think I had any right to ask you to go away from

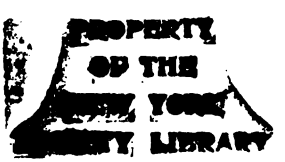
everybody you knew and everything you cared for. And I knew I hadn't any right to give up my work. I couldn't be a slacker, Mildred, even if there wasn't any war. I never thought you'd feel the same way about it till you said how you were going to work with John Barton — and even then I thought you didn't understand it yourself. And I was too jealous of him to try and think it out anyway. But I met him in North Dakota and he told me that you weren't going to be married after all, and how you were working on super-steel that I'd never heard of before. And after that I thought I'd *never* get leave to come here, and then that the train would *never* get in!"

Nick stopped literally for lack of breath. Mildred still stood fluttering her ink stained fingers.

"I — I was going to tell you too, Nick, that you'd be disappointed in the way I felt about things — you see I couldn't tell myself last year what I know now! But it's so dull here! I like to ride and dance and everything — only there's nothing else at all! And when I was driving a tractor in Minnesota and sometimes not seeing anything but a rabbit for half a day — why I was part of everything myself! I was part of the government and I was almost as important as the crops themselves. Why, it mattered to everybody in the country how I did my work! But it doesn't matter to anybody how I dance or dress and that's all I had to do here. I couldn't stand it so I'm working every day in father's steel mill. They're making super-steel for reaper blades because I broke so many in Dakota. And I'm finding other things that ought to be made of steel that won't break, and trying to get people to make them of it and then to use the things after they're made. Oh, Nick, it's *wonderful!* And that's what I wanted to tell you about — I've got to do my work as a citizen too. I can't give it up!"

Mildred tried to look at him dispassionately in the light of her weakening resolution. She repeated to herself that in spite of what he said about his work he hadn't cared enough about her to come back all winter — and was surprised to find that this had become a matter of no importance! She called up her intention to devote her life to the great work of feeding the world, — and found that it didn't stand in her way! How was it that the Chinese lilies in the corner smelled so much like the late tuberoses at Torexo? What was this sea of riotous disquieting perfume that invaded the staid drawing room in Washington Square? Mildred trying to lift her chin above it, looked straight into the eyes of Nick Van Arsdale. Was he coming toward her or was it her own footsteps that were bringing them together? She tried to pull herself together and decide what she was to do. Then in answer to her own question she heard her voice say:

"Nick, if you think we could do it together —"


PROPERTY
OF THE
LIBRARY

Printed in the United States of America.

THE following pages contain advertisements of a few of the Macmillan books on kindred subjects

Home Efficiency

By MARTHA BENSLEY BRUÈRE

AND

ROBERT W. BRUÈRE

Cloth, 12mo, $1.50

Here is a book that deals in a clear, scientific manner with a phase of married life that has been too long neglected or treated only in thin sentimentalities. The young wife has been expected by tradition, and by dint of economic conditions, to manage the intricate workings of the home and to meet and solve the many questions that arise, without any training for her work or knowledge of the problems she faces. The authors believe that for the vocation of housewife there should be as careful technical education as for the physician, the lawyer, the editor or the politician; that modern science can be harnessed to the use of the household just as it has been harnessed to the use of a steel works; that the mother of children has an opportunity for the use of skill in pedagogy not surpassed by the teacher, and that coöperation between households calls for as much diplomacy as that exercised by statesmen.

The book is a direct answer to the statement so often made that housework is mere drudgery, for it shows that the proper management of the home is one of the most complex, intellectual and difficult of professions.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Publishers 64-66 Fifth Avenue New York

MAY SINCLAIR'S NEW NOVEL

Mary Olivier: A Life

By MAY SINCLAIR,
Author of "The Tree of Heaven," etc.

Cloth, 12mo. Preparing

No novel of the war period made a more profound impression than did Miss Sinclair's "The Tree of Heaven." The announcement of a new book by this distinguished author is therefore most welcome. "Mary Olivier" is a story in Miss Sinclair's best manner. Once again she has chosen a theme of vital interest and has treated it with the superb literary skill which has put her among the really great of contemporary novelists.

A woman's life, her thoughts, sensations and emotions directly presented, without artificial narrative or analysis, without autobiography.

The main interest lies in Mary Olivier's search for Reality, her relations with her mother, father and three brothers, and her final passage from the bondage of infancy, the conflicts of childhood and adolescence, the disenchantments (and other drawbacks) of maturity, to the freedom, peace and happiness of middle-age.

The period covered is from 1865 when Mary is two years old to 1910 when she is forty-seven.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
Publishers 64-66 Fifth Avenue New York

EDEN PHILLPOTTS' NEW NOVEL

Storm in a Teacup

BY EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Author of "The Spinners," "Old Delabole," "Brunel's Towers," etc.

Cloth, 12mo, Ready shortly

This carries on Mr. Phillpotts' series of novels dealing with the human side of the different industries. Here the art of paper making furnishes the background. The theme is somewhat humorous in nature. A young wife picks a quarrel with her husband because he is commonplace, and elopes with a man of high intellectual ability. Finding him, however, extremely prosaic and a bore, she is glad in the end to return to her first love.

The elopement, it might be explained, was purely a nominal one, carried out on a high moral basis with the most tender respect for the lady's reputation and character. This fact leads to a number of unusual and frequently amusing situations.

From Father to Son

BY MARY S. WATTS

Author of "Nathan Burke," "The Rise of Jennie Cushing," "The Boardman Family," etc.

Cloth, 12 mo. Preparing

The hero of Mrs. Watts' new story is a young man belonging to a very wealthy family, who has had every sort of luxury and advantage and who, upon entering his father's office after leaving college, finds that the huge fortune founded by his grandfather was mainly made by profiteering on the grandfather's part during the Civil War. The question is what is this young man of the present day to do? He is high-minded and sensitive and the problem is a difficult one. What, too, is his own father to do — also a man of sterling character, though of a sterner type. The theme which grows out of this situation is one of singular interest and power and involves a moving crowd of characters.

Among these is the hero's sister, who marries a German attaché at the embassy in Washington; and another sister, who marries a young man of the same social set — and things happen. There is a drunken scalawag of a relative — who might be worse, and there are one or two other people whom readers of Mrs. Watts' books have met before. The dates of the story are from 1911 to the present year.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Publishers **64-66 Fifth Avenue** **New York**

NEW MACMILLAN NOVELS

The Rising of the Tide: The Story of Sabinsport

By IDA M. TARBELL

Cloth, 12mo.

A great many people will be interested in the announcement that Miss Tarbell has written a story of the war— perhaps not so much of the war as of the American spirit which contributed to so large an extent to early victory. The scene of her book is a mining and manufacturing town, which, when the national emergency arises, becomes a munitions making center. The way in which America awakes to the fact that it has a distinct part to play in repelling lawlessness and world aggression is vividly shown by means of a story in which dramatic incidents occur frequently. There is also an interesting love theme.

The war is over to be sure, but this fact, perhaps, makes Miss Tarbell's narrative of the days when this country was being tested of even greater appeal.

The Jervaise Comedy

By J. D. BERESFORD

Cloth, 12mo.

This novel is just what its title implies — a comedy, a humorous story that will interest and amuse the reader through its situations and characters, and will delight them because of the charm with which it is told.

A young dramatist, making a week-end visit with people he hardly knows, suddenly finds himself involved as an onlooker, and later as a participant, in a planned but only half-executed elopement. The incidents leading up to the elopement and following it are spiritedly narrated and the love story which develops between the dramatist and the sister of the male "eloper" is handled with rare skill.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Publishers **64-66 Fifth Avenue** **New York**

NEW MACMILLAN NOVELS

Our House

By HENRY S. CANBY

Cloth, 12mo. Preparing

Mr. Canby, known as a teacher of literature and critic, also as a writer of books on literary subjects, has written a novel, and one of singular appeal. Its central character is a young man facing the world, taking himself perhaps over-seriously, but genuinely perplexed as to what to do with himself. Coming back from college to a sleepy city on the borders of the South, his problem is, whether he shall subside into local business affairs, keep up the home which his father has struggled to maintain, or whether he shall follow his instinct and try to do something worth while in literature. This problem is made intensely practical through the death of his father. The story of what the young man does is exceedingly interesting. It takes the hero to New York and into the semi-artificial life of young Bohemia and ultimately brings him back home, where he finds the real happiness and success.

All the Brothers Were Valiant

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

Cloth, 12mo. Preparing

This is a stirring story of the sea somewhat suggestive in manner of Jack London's work. It has to do with two brothers of a sea-going family who go on a cruise with the hope of ultimately finding their older brother, Mark, who was lost on his last voyage. The adventures which they have on a mid-sea island, where Mark, pagan, pirate, pearl-hunter, is found, are absorbing. Hidden treasure, mutinies, tropic love, all these are here. The book thrills with its incident and arouses admiration for its splendid character portrayal.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Publishers **64-66 Fifth Avenue** **New York**